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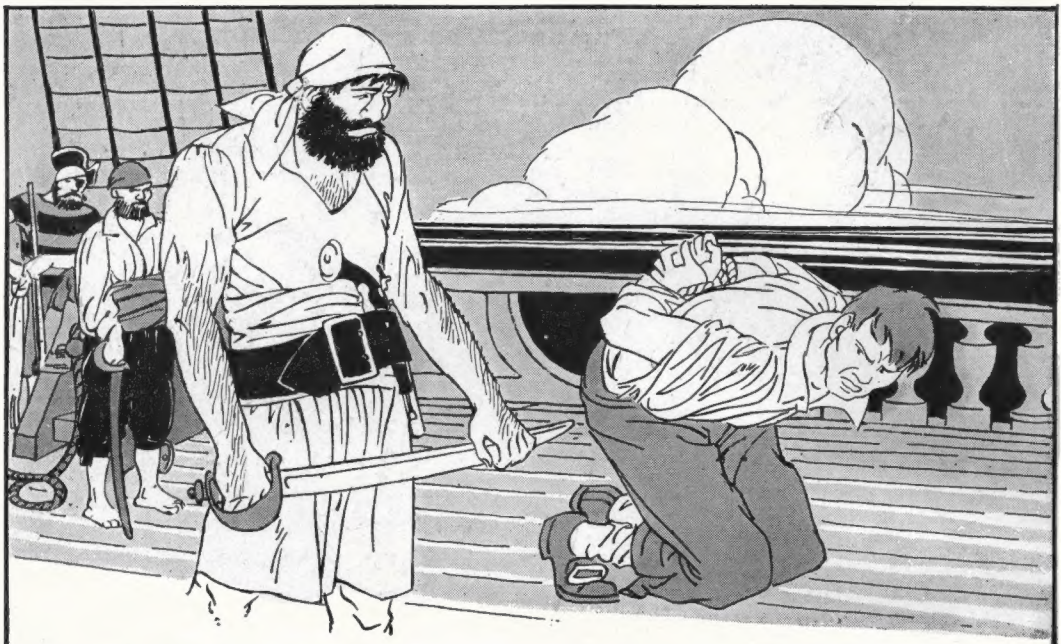

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Notice

BEGINNING with the last issue, ADVENTURE started publishing twice instead of three times a month. The dates of publication are the 8th and the 23d. See note in Camp-Fire of this issue, page 180.

Adventure—April 23, 1926 - Volume LVIII, No. 2—

The Creek of Poisonous Mist

A Complete Novel—

by Gordon MacCreagh

Author of "The Jest of the Jungle," "The Courage Medicine," etc.

BLAIR was headstrong. Even he admitted that. He was also intolerant. And there were times when he admitted that, too, or, at least part of it. When he quarreled with the head salesman or with the chief shipping clerk he would bounce off to his own desk and would growl savagely to himself that there were too darn many restrictions in that office and too gosh-blanked many bosses. His uncle, when he dispensed with his services, put it very concisely.

"You're intolerant of restraint as well as of discipline."

And Blair admitted the charge and saw no reason for being ashamed of it. But his uncle told him more, which he did not admit. For Blair was a young man of simple speech and direct action, and no analyst of terms and emotions.

"You're intolerant, too, of anybody else's opinion. You get into arguments with everybody about everything, and you haven't the guts to finish what you start."

That hurt. Blair winced under that charge. Nor was it altogether just. Blair was big enough and athletic enough and—yes, courageous enough to finish anything that he had started. But it did seem, somehow, that the other fellow was nearly always the one who had his way in the end. It requires something more than just muscle and courage to push one's end of an argument or a discussion—or a fight—through to a satisfactory finish. Perhaps the uncle would have been nearer to the truth if instead of the

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wide colloquialism of "guts," he had said "confidence;" or better still, "tenacity of purpose." But he was not choosing niceties of expression just then. He had counts enough against his nephew to be wholly anxious to be rid of him. He summed up.

"It's been a year now since I took you into my office with a futile hope of knocking some of your college foolishness out of your head and making a business man of you. But you've learnt nothing. You've quarreled with every single one of my heads of departments. You've been a glaring example of that most disruptive force, the relative of the boss; and you have never conscientiously applied yourself to your desk."

In all of which Blair was not so very different from many another American of his age and type and upbringing; and he remained steadfastly, headstrongly unashamed. But his uncle had reached the point of delivering himself of his ultimatum.

"Therefore, William, my boy," said he with finality, and paused a moment while he framed the right words.

And the nephew took advantage of the interruption to interject petulantly—

"For Pete's sake, uncle, don't call me William."

His objection was indicative of his character. His fond mother had called him Willie, and from his earliest boyhood he had loathed the soft significance of the name. "Bill" was more consistent with the type of man that his ambition visualized himself to be. It stood so much more for the things and places which were far removed from an office desk.

His uncle conceded the point.

"Very well, Bill," he said. But there was no relenting in his tone. "I have come to the conclusion that you just don't fit in my office. In fact, you don't fit in any office, and I'll be hanged if I'm going to recommend you to the offices of any of my friends. So what are you going to do about it?"

Bill Blair remained unabashed and, for once, singularly tolerant of his uncle's opinion. He admitted to the final charge with a cheerfulness amounting to alacrity.

"Guess you're right about an office job, uncle, and I don't know what I'll do. I suppose, since I took Spanish at college, I'll drift south somewhere and see what happens."

SO THAT was how Blair came to be at Manaos, that ghost of a city that had hewn a place for itself out of the farthest rubber jungles of Brazil and was now struggling against all the odds piled up by a treacherous river to keep from sinking into the grave that had suddenly yawned and engulfed the industry upon which it had mushroomed like a mining camp of '49.

He had done just that very dangerous thing for a white man who goes south. He had drifted. From Havana to Kingston, to Bridgetown, to Curaçao, to Caracas, to São Paolo, to Para and finally up the great river to Manaos. Some of the time he had loafed, reveling in his freedom from restrictions and bosses and avidly absorbing new experiences that were not of an office official. Some of the time he had worked. Though not much. There had been desultory jobs, each a little less dignified than the previous one; for jobs don't last well with a headstrong young man of intolerant opinion and wavering tenacity.

Blair had reached the very fine dividing line between respectability and the stage at which the men of the gringo club shrug and describe as "another of them." The one thing that had saved him from going the way of those others had been that the stern precepts instilled into him by his athletic instructor at college had established a sound inhibition against stimulating his flagging energy in the tropic heat with *aguadiente*. And that was how he came to be sitting with the American consul, still hard-muscled and able to think soberly. His uncle would have been interested to note that his opinionativeness had been rendered sufficiently plastic by knocking up against other hard-set opinions to make it possible for him, at least to ask if not to take advice. The consul made a suggestion.

"Braunschweig's export man went out with amebic dysentery a couple of days ago. I fancy I could get you in with—"

But Blair shrank from the idea with a swift interruption.

"No, sir, indeed. I've about reached the end of trying to hold down that sort of a job, any sort of a job. I've got to do something on my own, and I've got to hustle and find out what it's going to be 'cause my string is close to its thin end and it doesn't take the sour looks of the fellows at the club to let

me know it. So cut out the usual platitudes and tell me. What do you know about an occasional quill of gold coming from somewhere down the Rio Jurua side?"

"Oho!" the consul raised his eyebrows. "So you've heard that story? Well, I don't know much. But I can tell you that it's no use thinking about that."

Blair's headstrongness was immediately to the fore. His own somewhat prominent brows came together in an argumentative scowl.

"Why not?"

The consul pulled a wry face. This sort of an argument was nothing new to him. But that was what he was there for—to explain conditions and difficulties of the back creeks to his overconfident countrymen. He had reduced it to a formula.

"Why not is simple. You can go up the Jurua as far as Cigano by launch if you've got the money. From Cigano you can go on by *batelão* as far as this Jatuarana Creek if you've got the knowledge and the rare ability to find a crew of Indian paddlemen and humor them along so they will go there with you. You can go up the creek, as they call it—though it's a considerable river full of rapids and bugs—for some nine or ten days if you've got the grit to stick with that kind of travel, and let me tell you that no man knows what it's like till he's tried it. However, it is possible to make, say ten days up Jatuarana. And then there you're stuck. You can go no farther."

The consul did not know it, but he was enumerating a list of difficulties that were so far removed from the contents of an office desk that they appealed to all the pent-up rebellion against business routine that surged within Blair's turbulent soul.

"Why not?" came from him again with unshaken insistence.

"Because," said the consul as one locking a safe door, "ten days up you come to an Indian outpost and they won't let you go any farther. It's no use trying. There's a whole lot of tribes in the back creeks of these Amazon tributaries who have just withdrawn from the exploitation of trader men and have developed an ingrowing hate of *blancos*. This Jatuarana crowd seems to be particularly bad. And I'll tell you how I happen to know all this. There was a fellow called MacNeish who went up. He'd heard this yarn about gold coming from somewhere up there, so he thought he'd make a stab for it. And he had all the awful stick-to-itiveness of his race. Well, they stopped him. He came back and died of something or other that he had caught there. Some new thing that the local *medicos* couldn't place. MacNeish had a wild yarn about witchcraft and ghosts and trench gas and what-not. But he was all hooched up with native *caxiri*, and was woozy up to the minute he passed out."

Blair was far from relinquishing the topic. His mouth corners, naturally drooping in indication of his argumentativeness, drew down yet farther to an expression almost of sulkiness.

"Well, I've met a couple of men," he maintained, "who swear that if I can scratch up an outfit they'll go up to the last dry pan end of any blasted creek in all Amazonas."

The consul exhibited quick distress.

"My dear fellow, you don't want to get mixed up with that pair," he urged. "I know them. They claim to be Americans. But—gosh, I'm not here to knock our compatriots—but those fellows are adventurers pure and simple."

Blair could see no reason for avoiding a pair of men on account of that charge. The term, as a matter of fact, was part and parcel of his "Bill" complex. The consul saw the antagonism in his face and hastened to qualify.

"I mean, my dear fellow, they're a brace of men from God knows where, who live by their wits without being too particular how. And they're loud-mouthed and braggart and know-it-all, and, in fact, they're the kind of would-be he-men who rant about the wide open spaces."

The consul, as a matter of fact, had expressed the wide difference of meaning of that misused word very well. But his first hasty expression had aroused the ready opposition in Blair. Added to which he felt that he could well stand a dose of men of the wide open spaces just then.

Some men would have thanked the consul for his advice and would never have withdrawn to follow their own desire. And that type of man would never have quarreled with office managers. It was characteristic of Blair that he thanked the consul and added:

"But I guess I'll take a shot at that gold, anyway. I've got close on a thousand dollars left, and I'll gamble it on any last slim chance before it gets spent and I just have

to take a job or else become another of 'those'."

There spoke the Bill Blair whom his uncle had fired a year ago. The uncle just now would have been quite sure that his bull-headed nephew would, without any doubt, start on this quest of rumored gold. But he would have reverted with his tongue in his cheek to his charge about "guts enough to finish." The consul could see the bull-headedness in the frowning brows and the down-drawn mouth and wide jaw before him, and sensed that argument would be useless. The best that he could do would be to help his headstrong compatriot to a good start.

"Very well, then, if you must," he conceded. "I'm not here to restrain citizens, only to advise them. Let me advise you then and let me recommend you to a good Brazilian *batelero* who knows the rivers. Those two fellows haven't much river experience or they wouldn't brag about going up any blasted creek. And, as a matter of fact, you can't get them anyway because they pulled out of town yesterday."

"I know," said Blair. "They were fired out of their hotel and they went across river to São Joaquim to jump the Maranão launch without tickets."

"Well, that settles it then," said the consul with relief. "You can't connect with them today any more, and they'll be gone early tomorrow morning. Now I can recommend you to—"

"Why can't I get a couple of Indians to run me across in a dugout?" Blair interrupted. "Why can't I borrow a dugout and paddle over myself? Why can't I swim across?"

His impatience of restraint was reacting with hostility against so much repetition of "you can't." Not such a very bad characteristic, this—when one is not a subordinate in an army or an office or some such institution idolatrous of discipline, and when one tempers it, as Blair did not, with sound judgment.

The consul gaped at him and then, all innocently, drove him on to destruction.

"Don't talk foolish, man," he snorted. "You can't because you can't. You might find a couple of Indians with a canoe somewhere, though I couldn't tell you where. But as for paddling across yourself, it just can't be done. A dugout is a long cry from an Old Town canoe, and this Rio Negro of ours is a longer one yet from the worst water you've ever known. It's four miles solid of tricky whirls and currents and undertows. Maybe you don't know that the story along the waterfront is that if a man falls off the dock he never comes up again even once. So swimming talk is plain craziness. No sir. My bet stands. You can't connect with those men before they hop that Maranão launch."

SO THAT was how Blair came to be out in the middle of the Rio Negro alone in a dugout canoe late on a scorching afternoon. From the point of view of the consul and of the other gringos in Manaos it was crazy enough. For it is not compatible with the dignity of *blancos*, solidly entrenched in unimpeachable businesses on alien soil, to attempt to paddle dugout canoes across any sort of water at all, far less across the treacherous currents of the Rio Negro. And furthermore, most white men, when their evil fate plants them in a tropical country, lose interest in doing strenuous stunts. And this was distinctly a stunt.

Though from Blair's point of view it was perhaps not quite so crazy a stunt as it might have been to many another man. For, while he had been perverse enough not to tell the consul anything of this, swimming happened to be his longest suit. Four miles of ordinary water would have been nothing to him, and he felt stubbornly confident that a man who had swam the tide-ripped water from the Battery to the Lower Bay could, in the event of an upset, negotiate any river current.

He was beginning to regard the possibility of an upset with a certain measure of scorn too. A one-man dugout canoe, it is true, was a far cry from a scientifically designed Old Town. Heavy and with a scant four inches of freeboard and built, not with a view to water lines, but according as God had shaped the log, it was unresponsive to the short circular-bladed paddle that felt so unaccustomed to his hand. But he was beginning to get the hang of it. Sufficiently, at least, to keep its nose to a more or less diagonal against the four-mile current and to progress, when the cross currents let him, in the general direction of the farther shore.

Away upstream to his right another solitary canoe, the only other moving thing on

the mirror-black expanse of water, angled toward him, throwing a long V ripple behind it as it sped, apparently to overhaul him. Blair experienced a wave of envy at the long, easy strokes of its occupant, and with it an angry resentment at the ignominious thought of being so easily overtaken by an undersized native. He bent over and plowed along with considerable splashing and wasted effort for some minutes. He was almost beginning to congratulate himself at his progress when he felt a soft bump under the round bottom of his craft.

"Hallo! Shoals, sand bars, this far out?" was his thought.

But he remembered instantly that the Rio Negro at Manaos was navigable for ocean steamers from shore to shore.

"Must have scraped a log," he told himself, and paddled on.

But that was a most wilful log. In another minute it was in the way again. It rasped softly along the under side with a grating sensation which was not unfamiliar to Blair—like drawing a clam-rake over the bottom. The crazy canoe heeled to the very gunwale edge, and Blair suddenly tasted his heart in his mouth. However good a swimmer one may be there comes an inevitable qualm at the thought of some monster beneath one's boat that is unafraid enough to nuzzle up against it.

Caimans and sharks, of course, were the first thoughts that shocked him. But he knew that the caimans were no lovers of fast water and that they kept to the sluggish creeks and stagnant lagoons. Sharks, too, were out of the question twelve hundred miles from the ocean. Yet in the next instant a great serrated fin ripped sleekly out of the water in a long, lazy arc. It was full three feet long and its comb of bayonet spines stood a foot clear above the surface. It slipped under as silently as it had appeared, and then a flirt of the great tail left a sudden sucking cone which dragged the nose of the canoe toward itself and boiled round it in whirling bubbles.

Blair caught at his breath and drove his paddle into the water with great plunging strokes to get away from that place in a frenzy of apprehension. Futile thought. What hope could even an expert canoeman have of outdistancing such a monster in its own element? And this beast seemed to be as sportively inclined as a dolphin. With an effortless surge it was alongside again, and whirled and scraped under, heaving the tail end of the canoe up so that the nose dipped and took water, and Blair sat six inches deep.

Warm as the water was, the sudden clamminess of it through his duck pants sent Blair's heart out of his mouth all the way down to his white canvas shoes. The first qualm at this submarine attack had developed into something very like panic. Coupled with half formed thoughts of the pistol at his belt holster was a flash of very definitely formed regret that he had not listened to the consul's advice about venturing out on the wide Rio Negro in a dugout canoe. A plight which was very good for Bill Blair.

But he was given scant enough time either to plan or to regret. While he still thought vaguely of his pistol, the sportive monster rasped under his canoe again slowly, almost luxuriously, and then heaved up like leviathan rising out of the deep. The canoe see-sawed for a moment, lifted drunkenly, rolled and slid down on its own tail. Blair caught a glimpse again of that great saw-toothed fin, of a broad, gray-green back, and then he was in the water with that fearsome creature that lived in it.

Blair was much more at home in the water than in a dugout canoe. A subconscious memory about shark stories told him to dive and get beneath the enemy. With it came a crowding question as to whether his pistol would go off under the water—perhaps right up against the creature's belly. He dived, and realized then for the first time why the Rio Negro was so named. Six feet below the surface he was in the blackness of thin ink. Clear but impermeable. He could distinguish no more than the dim shadow of his hand before his face. Horror of the lower depths seized him. Convulsively he shot to the surface and clawed through the water with a powerful overhand crawl, rolling to the exact fractional angle and breathing with instinctive

perfection, his whole mind and muscle and sinew concentrated on the single frantic effort to get away.

A voice impinged on his consciousness. Dimly at first. But the insistent cries bore in. It was a voice shouting in crude Portuguese.

"Await me, senhor. It is I, Ohkohthithero, no less. Have no fear of the fish. It is *pirarucû.*"

Pirarucû! The name came to Blair's mind in connection with the huge slabs of semi-sun-dried fish that were such an offense to the nostrils in all the trade outfit stores along the waterfront. He knew the fish to be monstrous denizens of the black water that ran into three and four hundred pounds. But that was all. Of their food proclivities he knew nothing. Yet there was comfort in a human voice. He ceased from his wild race and whirled in the water.

The other lone canoe was bearing down on him, throwing a bow wave like a miniature speed boat. In it, or rather as if protruding out of its bottom, were the naked shoulders and arms of a six-foot man. But their lack of proportionate height above the gunwale was grotesquely apparent to Blair even from the water level. The canoe swooped down on him at full speed, missed his head by six inches and then, with a powerful out-drive of his paddle, the man spun the craft on its tail and brought it stationary alongside.

"*Ammâ-u!*" said the man. "It is a gringo. Only a gringo is mad enough to do this. *Am-mu i qua!* Do all gringos swim like the *pira* itself? Have no fear of the *pira.* It is not an eater of men. But get in, gringo."

It is remarkable how the confidence of a single man may offset the panic, sometimes, of a whole regiment. This extraordinary person's expert handling of his canoe, his cool familiarity in his queer jargon of broken Portuguese interlarded with exclamations in Geral dialect, his goblin grin were all so indicative of a confident command of the situation that Blair's courage swept back in a warm wave.

"If the fish isn't a man-eater, why should I get in?" he demanded. "How can I get into that canoe? It is barely big enough to hold you."

"*Qua gani!*" The man's voice cracked. "What a madness! This is the danger, gringo, for which cause people do not come in little canoes out into the black water. The *pira* loves to scratch its back under floating logs, and with its many-knifed fin it may rip your bowels forth like a rope. Safer is swimming far from anything that floats. Get therefore in. I sit my weight at the one end. Climb you in over the other."

Recollection of that great jagged fin that cut the water so sleekly was vivid in Blair's mind. Not so far downstream he could see his own craft rolling and heaving spasmodically as the great fish still tried to rid its back of the clinging parasites. At any moment it might transfer its attention to this new and more solid medium. A swift stroke carried him to the farther end of the canoe. The man grinned again and, with cat-like balance, swung his startlingly inadequate body backward between his long arms till he perched like some misshapen goblin at its extreme stern.

Blair had climbed into canoes before out of the water—Old Town canoes. He knew that it was a tricky procedure, but it could be done. Possibly even with this crazy thing of minimum flotation. With infinite precaution he heaved himself up over the end till his weight rested on his arms, all clear of the water except his legs. So far good. Remained the more finicky operation of edging forward till he could straddle the craft, and then he would be safe. The goblin at the other end grunted approval and balanced like a performing ape. Inch by inch Blair edged forward on his hands. Almost was he far enough to hoist himself to a sitting position when an oily undercurrent, boiling up from below caught the canoe and spun it sidewise. Blair's trailing feet acted as a drag. Just that much was necessary to upset the delicate balance. A wave slapped the side with a soft chuckle and the canoe rolled quietly over, as smoothly as a turning log.

IT WAS then that the goblin laughed. With a single long stroke he overtook the canoe and, with a dexterous heave, righted it. Blair was alongside in an instant. Never more than a few inches out of the water, the clumsy thing, full, floated with a bare half inch of clearance.

"What now?" said Blair. "We can never bail this."

"Never," agreed the other cheerfully. "We can but hang on and push, and maybe by midnight we reach the shore."

"What about *pira?*"

"If *pira* come, we must push the canoe far from us and swim alone."

The man was so cheerfully carefree at the prospect, and Blair, who knew swimmers, had noted his so easy dexterity that he felt hopeful in asking.

"Could you swim alone so far?"

The man laughed again.

"I tell you, gringo, my name Ohkoh-thithero. In Portuguese, Gato do Mar, the River Cat. This is my water."

"Then," said Blair. "Since it's safer, let's leave the canoe and swim."

Still the man demurred.

"Gringo can swim this black water. I have seen. If he can swim that far, let him swim. For me is risk of *pira* necessary, for that canoe is all that I have of possessions."

Blair would not have clung to so tempting a lure for a gamboling, razor-backed, fresh-water monster for all the money that the world could produce, and he was just as unwilling to leave this extraordinary character to so perilous a task.

"Come on," he ordered curtly. "I'll buy you another canoe."

The man was immediately willing. He grinned cavernously.

"Good," he agreed. "Gringos keep their word. We swim. I lead and show where currents are easiest. This is my water."

The next instant he called again:

"But this way, gringo. This way. The Manaos shore is much nearer."

Blair looked over his shoulder.

"That may be," he said shortly. "But I'm bound for São Joaquim."

The River Cat chuckled gurglingly and overhauled him with another of those phenomenally reaching single strokes.

"*Eh-heh, amma-uru,*" he was muttering. "This gringo is a very great senhor."

Blair paid no attention, but settled himself down to take a three-mile swim with an easy side stroke, holding plenty of power in reserve for another mad dash, if need be, from he didn't know what further menace in that unholy black water. The water-cat man swam in a manner all his own, more often below than on the surface. But he kept abreast. They had progressed in silence for perhaps a minute when he suddenly gavē a cry of dismay.

"*Awâ,* but am I a fool! In that canoe that used to be mine I left in a cleft cane my package of ipadu leaf for chewing. Let Senhor Gringo go on. I go fetch and I catch up."

And before Blair could remonstrate about the idiocy of returning into the danger zone all for a miserable package of chewing leaf, the man had spun round and was making amazing speed back to his abandoned canoe. Blair was in two minds about going on or standing by to assist if need be. Though he did not know of what possible assistance he could be to a man who might suddenly be gashed wide open by a three-foot-long, saber-toothed fin. Nor was he anxious to prolong any more than necessary his sojourn in the neighborhood of that fin. There is something more than merely nerve-racking in being far from dry land in deep swirling water of evil reputation and sufficiently unknown to contain almost any possibility of horror.

But despite the impulse to snatch his toes out of the cold lower currents and flee madly away, he trod water and waited. He saw the man arrive at his canoe without mishap and reach his arm over the gunwale to fumble within. Apparently he found what he wanted, for almost immediately he started back. Then Blair turned and rolled into his long overhand racing stroke. It piqued him to hear this sawed-off individual speak with such careless certitude about catching up, implying almost, since senhors indeed did not do this sort of thing often, that none of them could swim worth much consideration anyhow. Well, he would show him.

That was the second time within that hour that Blair had to admit the error of his opinion. And overwhelmingly. He had about a hundred yards start. He made perhaps a half a mile at his best speed when an abnormally long and knotty-muscled brown arm clove the water alongside of him —almost like a fin—and disappeared again. Six feet further another arm reached out from under and dragged forward, and then the round mop of a head emerged, already well past him.

Blair had sense enough not to waste any more strength in a futile effort. Any man who could overhaul him in a half mile with a hundred yards start was no person to race with. This misshapen creature was abnormal in more than form. It seemed that his very deformity recompensed him in this one respect by offering less resistance to the

water or something. The man swam with uncanny ease, just as if he reached out with his great arms and took hold of the water ahead of him and dragged himself forward; and Blair noticed now that the powerful arms were fitted at the ends with great hands almost like paddles.

"Hm, Gato do Mar," he said to himself with new understanding. "Why, that must be the Brazilian name for the great otter-like creature of Amazonas."

He swam in silence till he had regained his breath after his spurt, gratefully cognizant of a warm comfort in the presence of a fellow human by his side in the same plight who seemed to be familiar with the conditions and amazingly carefree about them. He was curious to know more about this queer person who seemed to know so little about the deference that was customary from a down-river Indian to a white man.

"What is your tribe?" he asked him. "Where is your village?"

"I have no tribe," said the man. "I am Ohkohthithero of the rivers. I lost my tribe when I was as tall as I am now but not so broad. I used to make my food by spearing fish, the *pira*, for the sellers in the market. Now I am the great senhor's servant."

"Which senhor's?" asked Blair, wondering what big boss in Manaos employed this extraordinary character.

"But the senhor's own," said the man with startling confidence. "What other gringo knows the water well enough to be a worthy master?" And he asked a question then of his own. "Where are we going, padrão?"

Blair did not know that he was in the market to employ a circus freak. But, after all, he reflected. A naked Indian did not cost much to support, and one who knew the rivers might prove useful as a guide if for nothing else. However, that could be decided upon later. He hid his smile as he rolled to swim on the other side, and answered:

"I go to São Joaquin to hire two white men who know the rivers to make a journey to the Jatuarana."

The Indian's quick reply held his interest.

"*Am-mul* To the *igarapé* of poison mist?" Blair turned quickly.

"Do you know this place?"

The man shook his head so the water sprayed as from a twirling mop.

"I have never journeyed there. But I have heard of the great witchcraft. What matter? Water is water. Where there is water, Ohkohthithero can go. For the rest, master, no white man knows the rivers. Let us turn and swim back to Manaos. In a canoe but a little bigger than those last two we can go to Jatuarana, and the great senhor can there doubtless overcome the witchcraft."

Witchcraft! Just what that Mac fellow had babbled about, according to the consul's story. But then, that other was fuddled with native cane alcohol and this was a superstitious Indian. Not that a little witchcraft would not be an exhilarating novelty, Blair thought. But as for going wandering up a mysterious river in a two-man canoe with this so insistent servant, that was another matter altogether. Besides, if the American consul couldn't dictate to him whom he should hire, by no means at all could a servant.

So Blair only grunted a short "hmph!" and kept his face in the opposite direction from Manaos town. But when the man grunted too and glided easily to the lead and called over his shoulder that by holding just such and such an angle against the current they would bring up at São Joaquim front, five miles lower down, he did recognize the fact that this man had amply demonstrated superior experience, and so followed. Which was quite a concession for Bill Blair.

"To São Joaquim let us then travel," said the man. "Water is water. It is all one to me."

It was perhaps an hour later that they pulled out at the sand spit below the granite outcrop which protected the nut sheds of the little settlement of São Joaquim from the fifty-foot rise of the river in the monsoon season. Blair, for his part, gratefully. And then for the first time he was able to get a full view of this phenomenon who called himself Ohkohthithero.

In the canoe out in the river there, when he had tried to climb in, he was fully occupied with the very delicate balance that the feat demanded and he had noted only the startling disproportion of the powerful shoulders and arms and the confident grin. He was able to see now, as the man stood up clear of the water, that a great barrel chest matched the shoulders—the upper

torso of a wrestler. But with that it seemed as though Nature, attempting too collossal a task, had expended all the material available and had been compelled to piece out the job with remnants. Despite the upper body of a six-foot athlete, the man stood barely up to Blair's chest—a scant four feet. Yet he was no cripple. The loins fell away in a clean run and the short legs were widely bowed and knotted with muscle.

"The perfect swimming machine," Blair muttered to himself. And then he found himself wondering why an ape was not a good swimmer, for the disproportion of the man's lower limbs brought his great hands down to his knee level. And his face, too, was elfishly simian, wizened and preternaturally old, with the shrewdest of alert black eyes and a gash of a mouth that grinned ever with strong white teeth.

"No family butler," thought Blair as he took stock of his new retainer. "But perhaps not such a bad man if he knows the rivers." Aloud he asked, "What do you know of boats and of river travel?"

"Everything," said the man without hesitation. "Senhor Padrão will now follow and I will lead to the *hospedaria* of Sebastian, where will be those two gringos who know nothing."

SO THAT was how Blair—not of his own volition, be it noted—came to acquire a servant. The man padded ahead of him in a quick, rolling trot that kept his much longer legs extended as much as was comfortable in the loose sand. The settlement lay beyond the sand spit on an extension of the outcrop that was well above flood water; and the dwarf took the slope without ever relaxing his trot. The stiff rise was nothing to the lungs within that barrel of a chest.

But Blair was panting when he halted at last before a rambling, single-story barrack of adobe faced with pink tile.

"That is the *hospedaria*," said the man. "It is the sundown hour when the gringos eat *jantar*. They will be in there eating and drinking. The *blanco*, Sebastian, does not permit *Indios* without clothes to enter as servants. I wait here while the Senhor Padrão talks with the gringos. I say only one thing. I know where boats of all the kinds, *monterias*, *batelãos*, canoes, may be bought."

Blair was aware of the very catholic courtesy accorded to the word *blanco*. Just as a gringo in Brazil meant any American or European of the non-Latin races, so a *blanco* might be any Latin or native of the country. Anybody, in fact, who wore pants to distinguish him from an *Indio*. Yet he was surprized to meet the negroid person who came forward as Sebastian, the proprietor of the strictly European plan hotel.

"Assuredly," said Sebastian.

The two gringos were his distinguished guests. They had not paid their day's reckoning in advance, as was his unbreakable rule with ordinary *blancos* who came to his establishment. But since these gentlemen were awaiting the senhor, their wealthy compatriot, he had gladly made the concession. And much relieved was he now that the senhor had arrived. Though he could not understand how, for there had been no boat. Very much relieved, indeed, for those two gringos, distinguished though they were without doubt, were men of domineering nature, and would have been most difficult to restrain when the Maranão launch came in the morning and they remained still in his debt.

Blair's only reply to this disclosure was a grunt, and he ordered the man bruskly—

"Take me to your guests."

The senhores, the distinguished compatriots of the wealthy American, were in the largest room of the strictly European plan hotel—the one with the smoothest trampled mud floor and the long table of solid three-inch mahogany, the permanent coat of grease on which was gratefully disguised by the pleasing dusk. For though the hour of *jantar* is universally set for 7 P.M., at São Joaquim, which is less than three degrees from the Equator, daylight lasts strictly from six to six. The distinguished guests greeted Blair with loud acclaim and, Blair thought, with a certain relief.

"Ho, hallo! Sit right in and *jantar* a bite with us, Billyum. We bin expecting you right along. Figured the consul' ud give us the right send-off, an' if you're thinking of goin' up river, we knew we were the right men for you."

This was Jim. "Big Jim" Tully, as he introduced himself with a jovial laugh to all and sundry. He was a trifle taller than Blair, and heavier all round. His features were big, too, and florid and—just that—jovial. Older residents than Blair in the

Brazilian ports would have placed him unerringly with the criticism that he was just a little bit too ingratiatingly jovial.

The other was Petros Kuyumjian. "Pete," a small, darker man, unassuming and quiet, with alert, dark eyes; very clearly the brains of the partnership.

To the older residents a single word would have sufficed to describe both of them to a nicety without further comment. They were *pajameros*. That is to say, white men who felt that they might, with perfect propriety, dress in pajamas as soon as they were "out," which meant anywhere beyond the immediate limits of a city as large as Manaos.

They were both in pajamas just now. Kuyumjian's wide-awake eyes lighted just once as Blair entered, and he extended the invitation, in precise English, to join their meal.

"Beastly native grub, Mr. Blair. Dried *pirarucu* and rice and red-hot chili pickle. But the coffee's good. Sit in and let's talk business while we eat."

Under the table he softly withdrew his foot from his slipper and kicked his partner twice in the signal which meant, "Now you keep shut and let me handle this."

He was nervous with eagerness. For this newcomer had been the best chance that had come their way. Almost their last chance, in fact. He had cursed his fate and his God equally with the flinty hotel keeper who had refused to let them stay any longer in Manaos to play their fish. And here the fish came asking to be caught.

"You leave me handle this smart alec," he had told Big Jim. "He's the easiest thing that was ever made for us by Providence. If he has any real dope about gold, so much the better. But I don't care. He wants to outfit for up-river and he thinks he knows it all. All right, let him. If we can get him to stake us to a trading outfit, we're fixed. 'Cause trade, I tell you, is my meat. I don't care where it is. If these dumb river traders can skin anything out of the jungle tribes, I'll go over the same ground and skin them twice. So you shut up and leave me make any deal that he wants."

Big Jim knew that when it came to diplomacy Mr. Kuyumjian could give him odds and a long start and still beat him to the post. So he kept shut as directed and restricted himself to his forte of genial fellow of the great outdoors.

"Shoot the proposition, Blair," was his cordial invitation. "We're wide open."

Headstrong and opinionative Blair might be in seeking out these two men against the advice of the consul, but those doubtful qualifications do not carry with them, as a necessary adjunct, foolishness. Blair had drifted close enough to the thin borderland of respectability where the gentlemen of the beach subsist in their many gradations of brokenness to know that this pair of schemers were hoping to find in him an angel for any sort of proposition at all that would relieve their existing predicament and might lead to anything else at all.

MOST men with that knowledge would have steered well clear of the pair. But Blair—it would have surprized his uncle very much to know—had drifted close enough also to tropical borderlands to have acquired a feeling of the vastness of the empty beyond and, with that feeling, an unwonted sense of humbleness that his knowledge was insufficient to meet those unknown conditions. He had heard the border dictum too often—"A white man can't go into the jungle alone." And the earnest intensity of the restraining negative for once did not antagonize him.

Awe of the great silent unknown convinced him that he needed the company and support of at least one white man, even if such a one's experience were not so very much greater than his own. As for experience, it was Bill Blair's stout contention that a man picked up experience as he went along. But where his opinionativeness came out was that he felt he could go into the jungle with any two men and keep his own end up. Which brought the question of opinionativeness down to a matter entirely of opinion. For, after all, it would be according to the result that he would ultimately be judged. For who without bias shall say where lies the fine distinction between pig-headed opinionativeness and a fine, firm confidence?

So Blair sat down on the rickety chair of scented cedar that was offered to him and announced—

"Well, I've about decided that I can gamble an outfit for this jaunt up to the Jatuarana."

Both men beamed on him. Here were their dreams coming true.

"I knew you couldn't go wrong on that proposition," enthused the jovial Jim.

And Mr. Kuyumjian followed it up with:

"Well, you've come to the right men, Mr. Blair, to get that outfit together, though I do say it myself. Now between the two of us, we know where a boat and trade goods—"

"What I came to talk about," Blair interrupted, thinking of that queer River Cat's almost prophetic last word, "was just what kind of a dicker can we make about the proposition? You see, I can just about afford to grubstake an outfit and expenses. But I can't talk salary with you fellows. If you'll gamble your time, I'm open to listen to you on a split basis."

Mr. Kuyumjian deftly turned the delicate matter of suggesting the basis on which they were to share back to the greenhorn with the quick assumption that he would be easy to deal with.

"And what would be your idea of a fair split, Mr. Blair?"

"Grubstake rules," said Blair promptly. "Fifty per cent. to the stake and an even three way split for our time after that."

Mr. Kuyumjian winced. This greenhorn was not so green. But he kicked his partner under the table again before the ready remonstrance on his lips could find utterance. What did terms matter after all? If they could but once get afloat with a trade outfit there would doubtless be ways and means which might be devised by an astute man for evening up any discrepancy.

"Those are the rules, Mr. Blair, and fair enough they are, I'll say. Now about getting all this stuff together. I suppose, since you don't know anything about the rivers and the conditions, you'll be wanting us to do your buying for you."

The greenhorn was still disappointing.

"Mm-hm, I may need a little of your help. But what I principally came over for was to see you fellows before you jumped that Maranão launch. So if we can call it a deal, we might shake hands on it."

"Shake hands, ——! How about a drink on it?" boomed Big Jim.

Blair shrugged.

"Well might as well, I suppose, 'cause I'll be buying no hooch for our outfit. I've heard the story of one man who went under with *cashassa* on this same quest."

This was something of a blow, but there was worse coming. Blair crooked his finger to the single *moço* of the establishment and ordered three green ones. The new partnership drank together and shook hands on their pact. And it was then that it was forced upon the attention of the others that Blair was wringing wet.

"Why? What? How come?" was the question.

"Came over in a dugout," explained Blair laconically. "Upset out in the middle and had to swim the rest. That's what I'm in a hurry about. I've got to hustle out and arrange to get back. I'll square your account here and see you in Manaos tomorrow. Right? So long then."

Short, sweet and concise. Hearty Big Jim and clever Pete were left looking at one another. Big Jim turned on his partner fiercely.

"Easy, yuh said he was, yuh punkhead. He didn't know nothing about the rivers. Leave 'm to you. I'm here to tell you, Syriac, that any fool who starts from Manaos in a dugout an' swims half way knows things about rivers 'at you'n me don't. I'm for jumping that launch an' see what turns up at Maranão.

Mr. Pete Kuyumjian threw out his hands in a gesture of deprecation and defense.

"Sh-sh! For Mike's sake now, listen to me," he urged. "We want an outfit, don't we? Well, listen to me then."

The irrefutable simplicity of his premise reduced Big Jim to dissatisfied growlings. Outside, Blair found his giant dwarf squatting like a ghoul in the dusk by the door. Where he had been all this while Blair had no means of knowing. But the man delivered himself of an ultimatum.

"I have one thing to say. I am the great senhor's servant. But from those two gringos I take no orders."

Blair was beginning to understand that just as there was a distinction between gringos and *blancos*, so there were grades of each. Some remained just gringos or *blancos*. Others might also be senhors. Others again, a few, might rise to the eminence of great senhors. He laughed and told his master of heraldry.

"*Bom*, it is well. Nobody at all takes orders from those two gringos."

"Good," said the dwarf. "I am the Senhor Padrão's servant, and I have borrowed from a catcher of fish here a canoe to take us back to Manaos at no cost."

AND that was how Blair came to strike a partnership with the two men against whom the consul had warned him. Despite which he felt that he was well started on his way to his last gamble with fate for a free life in God's good open places against the drudgery of some sort of a job in an office.

Started. But would he finish? He thought sourly of his uncle's accusation as he followed the River Cat down to the dim edge where the great black river lapped chucklingly at a long canoe.

Blair thought that he might do better on the following morning than wait for the arrival of his distinguished compatriots to do his buying for him. He had won a stubborn battle against the proprietor of the hotel the night before on the subject of his naked retainer. In that far border country which knows no color line so many of the patrons of the establishment were so mixed up in their ancestry that a line of demarkation had to be laid down somewhere and there rigorously maintained. Since color was a delicate subject and language offered no shibboleth, the line that marked a *blanco* must of necessity be what the gringos, safe in their pale purity, referred to as the clothesline.

The proprietor, then, had angrily maintained his point that it was against every rule of procedure for a decent hotel to permit a man who wore no more than a geestring to enter. Blair had taken the belligerent stand that it was midnight and he was there and his servant was there, and he saw nothing in the immediate landscape that might prevail upon him at that hour to go elsewhere.

This was the following morning, and he was still there; and so was his servant, who had slept on the soft gray-toned tile floor of the veranda outside of his door and who was more convinced than ever that the senhor padrão who could successfully flout a rule that was almost a state law was a very great senhor indeed. Blair called him into a consultation over the daybreak cup of black coffee served in bed, which is called *almoço* and means breakfast.

"How does one travel to the Jatuarana?" he asked.

The dwarf squatted and swept the thin carpet up into a heap with one enormous paw. Then very simply he wet his finger in his mouth and drew a map on the floor.

"Look. This is the way of the waters. Here is the black water flowing east. One day's journey down it meets the great water, Solimoes.* Solimoes comes from the west. No man knows where. Seven days up is Jurua, coming from the south. Ten days up is Jatuarana, coming from I do not know where. But what matter? Water is water."

Blair let him finish his exposition, anxious to see just how much the man did know. With a dry smile he compared this simple admission about the Jatuarana with the brag of his partners, and asked his servant again—

"What I particularly wanted to know was how does one—by what means is it best to travel to Jatuarana?"

"I would take an *uba*," said the dwarf promptly. "A light canoe such as the senhor padrão is going to give me—"

Blair had to laugh out loud at the simple directness of this man's mind.

"Listen, River Cat," he said. "I want to know how I must travel to the Jatuarana. As for a canoe, I don't know where to buy a canoe. I will give you money to buy one for yourself."

The dwarf's grin broke out like a sudden gash across his face.

"Of what use is money to me? If I had money, some *blanco* trader would cheat me of it for something of poor make. Also of what use is a canoe to me who am senhor padrão's servant? Why does padrão want to go to Jatuarana, which is bad water?"

A *blanco*—and most gringos who knew the customs of the country—would have cuffed the man about the ears and would have dismissed him as being entirely too lacking in deference for a servant. But Blair was unaware that his dignity required such careful watching. He answered the dwarf's question.

"Because I have heard a story about gold somewhere up there. What do you know of that story?"

The dwarf's face screwed itself up to a wrinkled mask of monkey shrewdness and he swung his body between his long arms confidentially closer to his master.

"I do not know Jatuarana, padrão. Many lies come out of the rivers. But I have heard that the people who live beyond the great witchcraft of the poison mist have gold. *Blancos* may not go beyond the

* The Amazon.

witchcraft. But if senhor padrão can overcome that magic and if the tale is true, how will he get the gold?"

That was just what Blair would very much have liked to know himself.

"Darned if I know," he muttered to himself. "Trade for it, I suppose."

The dwarf grinned all over his face again.

"That is good," he announced. Senhor padrão is a great senhor. In these rivers many would have in mind to cheat for it. For trade padrão must go to Jatuarana in a *batelão* with goods. But—" he pointed a thick finger with sudden warning—"not with bad goods such as the trader *blancos* carry. For look, padrão, those people beyond the witchcraft have heard how the custom of the *blanco* is to cheat the people of the rivers and to beat them and to steal their women, and that is why they have built a wall of magic across their road."

A veritable mine of wisdom this strange rover of the rivers was proving to be. It took time to dig the valuable facts out of the mine. But Blair was getting what he wanted.

"The custom of my country is to trade with good goods," he assured the dwarf. "Now where do we buy such goods and a good *batelão*?"

The dwarf spread his hands like fans.

"Good goods are easy if one will pay, as the trader *blancos* will not. A *batelão* may be bought in Manaos if one will pay. Paddle men may be hired if one will pay. But the smoke boats go to Jurua. In the Jurua will be *batelãos* of traders who have died or who are sick or who need money. I, Ohkohthithero, know of good paddle men in the Jurua. My word is to buy a *batelão* in the Jurua. And besides," he added naïvely, "I have never ridden in a smoke boat."

Blair felt that the advice he received here was as disinterested and free from bias as his partners were self-seeking and prejudiced. He felt, too, that since he was buying the outfit, he had a right to purchase what he chose without consulting them. They would be coming from across the river by the launch that arrived at noon. So he laughed shortly to himself, not without a certain satisfaction at their prospective disappointment, and spent a busy morning shopping in the great trade supply house of Araujo where everything for up-river trade, from beads and brilliant print cloth to beans and imported *pâté de fois gras*, may be found under the one roof.

It is not usual for a gringo to outfit for up-river trade. Blair, therefore, caused comment, which was augmented to wonder at the extraordinary figure of the Indian who padded at his heels, and was raised to the nth degree of amazement at the quality of the goods that he selected.

Naked Indians, of course, everybody had seen. But Manaos is a town which prides itself on its civilization, and a *selvagem*, as they called him, a savage or a *feroz*, a ferocious person, was as rare in a Manaos store as an Iroquois brave on Broadway. And such a savage! Even old, established rivermen stopped to stare.

But the dwarf, all unconscious of the attention he was attracting, was experiencing the adventure of his life. He had heard of stores where there were piled up treasures such as the trader men so sparingly displayed. Ever he hovered at Blair's back and ever with unconscious effrontery his long arm reached out and took samples of the goods under discussion.

Beads he weighed in his hard hand as in a jeweler's balance. Print cloth he tested and tasted and tore with all the care of a New England housewife. Knives he tried out on the horny sole of his foot. For a machete he sought a counter leg to hew.

"This is bad goods, padrão, and that is trader quality. This other you must buy. And that there is worthy of good trade. For such a knife—" indicating a ten cent store kitchen knife— "I will hire in the Jurua a paddle man for a week."

To the remonstrances of the salesmen, who wanted to unload upon him the regular line manufactured for the delusion of the unsophisticated and who chafed at hearing their shoddy material so mercilessly exposed in the balance according to their lasting quality, Blair growled:

"Shut up. Maybe I act green. But he knows what the Indians back in the jungles want."

Which, of course, was a clinching argument. And so he bought fish-hooks and little mirrors and iron nails— "for arrow points, padrão"—and knives and queer little ax heads which, for some curious reason, have become a standard demand in the upper rivers, and porcelain teeth for necklaces and big iron spoons.

AN ASSORTMENT which to those practised trade outfitters was crazy enough, for at that quality there was little profit in these things. Cheap print cloth at fourteen cents a meter they would have sold him, three meters of which a "piece" was the standard price of a woman among the debased lower tribes; and brittle bladed hardware that could be relied upon to break and keep up the demand for replacements. But Blair's natural contrariness found zest in repulsing their importunities with:

"Have any of you counter-jumpers ever been in the upper rivers? No? Well then, let the man be. He doesn't need any amateur advice about what goes there."

Perhaps if it had occurred to him that he himself was without question submitting to didactic advice from a naked *selvagem feroz*, his ego would probably have felt the need of asserting his own opinion. And yet again, the savage so confidently and obviously knew just what he wanted, and Blair on the edge of the great beyond had reached a state of humility in which he admitted that he himself knew nothing; that expert advice, instead of irking him, was as easily acceptable as manna in the wilderness.

And so the pile grew. Hardware and flaming wall paper pattern calicoes and beads. Honest goods, fit to be retailed in the markets of Manaos City itself rather than to naked Indians of the farther rivers who had never known that such serviceable qualities existed. Then came rope, apparently useless fathoms of it, made of a coarse native fiber. And finally, with fine irony, the enemy itself. *Pirarucu*. A couple of bales of it; the great slabs wrapped in palmyra matting and gunny which afforded no protection whatsoever from their rank odor. Blair rebelled.

"Great land! Why do I have to carry that stuff?" he demanded. "I thought that salt cod stank. But this beats all death. I'll be hanged if I'm going to live with that on my boat for a stretch of months."

A sturdy trader man who had been watching the purchases with a keen eye laughed and told him:

"The senhor travels into the upper rivers, no? I judge that by the rope which will be necessary for the rapids. Well, you must first pass through many days of flood country. And what will you then feed your crew? Believe me, senhor, men can not do that sort of work on *farinha* alone. And believe me again when I tell you that the time may come when you will be glad to eat *pira* yourself. Let be. Your extraordinary servant knows. As for the charnel stench, you will get accustomed to it in time, as we of the rivers do, for *pira* is always with us.

"Take but one advice. Above all things, preserve it from the wet. Rather than your clothes or your blanket or your hammock. In this season that will not be so difficult. But if your travel extends on into the rainy season, then have a care, for *pira* is but sun-dried and rubbed with a little salt—not much—on account of the tax which makes it so expensive, yet just enough to draw the damp out of the monsoon air. And wet *pira* will as surely taint every last thing that you carry as well as will the kerosene oil for your lamps which will inevitably ooze over your whole *batelão*."

"*Ouve lhe*. Listen to him, senhor," one of the clerks told Blair. "For if any man knows the rivers, it is Theophilo."

Blair listened perforce. The man's not very lucid comments were uncomfortably suggestive of strenuous travel. The consul's words came to his mind: "If you've got the grit to stick with that kind of travel." His uncle would have called it "guts" to stick with it. Blair's eyebrows came together in a pugnacious frown and he bit hard upon murmured profanity. His whole expression was indicative of a fierce resolve to go through with it, to stick at all costs. But it might have surprized his uncle to know that he was thinking of himself in this connection not at all. He was wondering all unconsciously and not very complimentarily how those two newly acquired and untried partners of his would stand up under the strain and he was growling to himself in advance at the prospect of the trouble that he imagined he would have with them.

Trouble, or, at all events, the dawning intimation of it, commenced that same afternoon with the arrival of the pair from across the river. All eager, they came in pleasurable anticipation of an orgy of buying, one of Mr. Petros Kuyumjian's oftenest expressed tenets being that he who handles money makes money. They found

Blair taking his ease in the hotel out of which they had been ejected the morning before. There was no abasement in the manner of either of them as they strode in. Big Jim, on the contrary, greeted Blair in his most jovial manner.

"Howdy, brother. How's the boy today? Here we are, right up to scratch. That's us. On the mark when we says it. That's how we do business. On the job an' ready to go as soon 's you'll be."

"M-hm," said Blair. "That's fine. We'll go tomorrow morning's boat."

Pete chimed in.

"Tomorrow morning? That's short notice, Mr. Blair. But never fear, we can make it. We know just where to go for all the stuff you'll need, and we'll have that outfit all collected by tomorrow morning down to the last dot."

"Outfit's all bought," said Blair. "It'll be delivered direct to the steamer where my *moço* is waiting to check it off."

"Bought?"

This was a shock to both of them as severe as it was beyond all bounds of evil expectation. Pete's careful English went to the winds as he clamored:

"All bought, you say? But—but that's a —— of a note. We thought—we figured on doing your buying—er, getting the stuff we'd really need. Why, how the deuce did you know what outfit we need for a river trip?"

Blair lolled with a leg thrown over the arm of his chair.

"Advice of a man who knows the rivers inside out," he said tersely.

Big Jim's disappointment got the better of him. He had fondly counted on filling out quite a number of little needs out of that business of purchasing for the greenhorn. Now his bleak prospect was to spend the next few months as achingly short of his pet weaknesses as the preceding six. His expression lowered. The difference between boisterous joviality and blustering is only one of tone.

"Well, jeez! Say, pardner, if yuh ask me, I'll call that a stacked deal. If we're aimin' to work this prospect as pards, I allows to have the right in pickin' outfit."

It is usual when a man has a reputation for starting trouble such as Blair was accused of, that he backs down when trouble starts toward him. In justice to Blair, however, it must be said that he was quick to meet this advance of Big Jim's with quick resentment. Yet he found himself smiling at the other's pose of talking "Western." Instead of entering into one of those arguments then, for which so many office managers had cursed him, he fished a document of several sheets from his pocket.

"There's Araujo's invoice," he said. "I don't concede your right. 'Cause I'm grubstaking, and my stake is whatever I care to provide or can afford. But if either of you can think of any item which we ought to have and which isn't there, I'll go ahead and get it. If you think the stake isn't good enough for a trip to the Jatuarana and clear through to Bolivia if need be, there's no harm done. We can call the deal off."

The unconscious threat conveyed in that last was a clinching argument. Blair had not intended it as such. He spoke only to show his fine independence as a matter of establishing something of the proper relationship between himself and his partners. He knew that they were anxious to make connections with some sort of employment, but he did not know that they were ready to go anywhere, or rather, to start for anywhere with almost any sort of equipment.

Big Jim took the invoice sheets and turned them over uncomprehendingly. Then he confessed. Though confession is hardly an adequate description of his action. Big Jim was the kind of bold he-man who never confessed. He covered his ignorance under brag.

"Shucks, I ain't any sort of a hand at this spig stuff. Plain Amurrican was all the lingo my father had an' my grandfather before him, and it's good enough for me. Here Pete, you run yer eye over that and see how she reads."

Pete Kuyumjian was one of those dark citizens of New York and the rest of the world to whom all languages are an open book. He skimmed over the invoices with rapid ease and, though he was unaware of it, the lift of his eyebrows from time to time betrayed his surprize. There were items there that neither he nor his running mate, for all their boasted knowledge, would have thought of. Items, not merely of convenience, but of vital necessity. A most complete and well ordered outfit in fact.

His agile mind was quick to accept his disappointment and to turn it into channels

of gratification. It was unfortunate that he had not had the buying of all these goods; but who could tell what lucky accident of river travel might not leave him heir to a trading outfit such as a potentate of exchange and mart would envy? He handed the papers back to Blair with a complete resumption of his silkiest manner.

"I can find no fault Mr. Blair. In fact, I must congratulate you upon having availed yourself of the advice of a man who knows more about up-river travel than either Jim and myself."

"M-hm," said Blair. "He sure does. You'll be meeting him on the boat tomorrow."

"And I suppose," added Mr. Kuyumjian, hoping against hope, "that it is upon the advice of this expert that you propose to buy a *batelão* at some point farther up? If by any chance not, I know of just the boat for—"

"Yep, up in the Juruá somewhere we'll get a *batelão* and crew," was Blair's concise interruption.

AND that was how he started upon the trail into the dim creek of reported witchcraft with two white men as his stand-bys for mutual protection in case of need.

Steamboat travel up the farther reaches of the Amazon river is no more eventful than steamboat travel up any other river. One eats too much and sleeps too much and between whiles one watches the monotony of endless bank slide past. The only difference is that the manner of eating and sleeping and the scenery of the bank varies.

Blair learned, for instance, that the conventions of civilized society reached no farther into the interior than Manaos; that carefully dressed business men, the moment that the steamer pulled out, gratefully relaxed and faced the heat in pajamas and grass slippers.

To which custom was appended a subtle corollary, to wit: Gringos who became *pajameros* were looked down upon. Not because there was any intrinsic sin in pajamas—Don Rabeira da Gonçalvez-Cardozo, the rich *estanceiro* of Fonte Boa, himself wore the floweriest silk ones—but because gringos who held themselves in esteem did not wear them by day. He found himself thus insensibly distinguished from his partners by the rest of the half dozen passengers. It was to him that questions about his plans were directed; to him that advice was tendered.

Unconsciously at first he was made to feel—and presently his natural assertiveness accepted the fact—that whatever might be the share basis upon which they traveled, he was the boss of that outfit; and with that came the uneasy glimmerings of a realization that he was coming to a country far removed from law where a man was boss, not because of the authority behind him as in an office, but because of the material—the "guts" of his sardonic uncle—in his own lone self. He thought sourly of that uncle of ill omen.

Blair learned, too, that beyond Manaos one slept not in the bunks that the little steamboat's six cabins provided, nor in a bed nor in a camp cot, but in an abnormally wide and ornate hammock, a thing that could be rolled up when one went where river steamers didn't go and could be stuffed under a bale in a saddlepack or into the bow of a *batelão*. It gave him a feeling of confidence to note that all these smallish—some of them rather sleekish—swarthy gentlemen were supplied with hammocks and were, by inference, going without a qualm beyond the ken of river steamers.

He learned also to eat *farinha*, that brittle, nutty substance which is the national food adjunct and is more than a condiment; an auxiliary, rather, to be sprinkled over everything from soup to meat and to take the place of nuts. He learned in connection with it the disquieting fact that it was made from the manihot yam and that it formed the main diet of whole tribes of Indians who lived in the upper rivers where he was going, for the reason that the manihot yam, before preparation, was so full of hydrocyanic acid that it was the only cultivatable thing that the great sauba ants did not eat up.

Big Jim scooped a spoonful of the stuff over the juiceless piece of meat, which passes in all Brazil for steak, and said:

"Funny stuff these spigs eat instead o' the reg'lar trimmin's. But there's a heap o' grub to it. When we get our own crew, this is what we feeds 'em. This an' nothing else. Costs a cent a day per each. That's easy ridin', eh?"

Blair nodded.

"I've been figuring on letting them have some fish to help out," he said.

"Shore," said Jim. "They'll fish every time we let 'em rein in for a breather. That's one of their best suits. They'll make a noise like they're all tuckered out, an' when we falls for it and let them rest, they'll catch fish. You gotta drive them Injuns, lemme tell yuh."

"What I meant," said Blair, "was that I've got about two hundred pounds of *pirarucu* in the stores."

"Two hundred pounds o'—"

Big Jim remained agape while he did a painful calculation. Two hundred pounds of *pirarucu* must have cost at least a hundred and fifty milreis. Real money. Enough to have purchased a considerable quantity of his own needs which he was having to do without.

"Say, pardner," he blurted out, "you shore ain't aimin' to pamper an Injun crew with *pira?*"

"I wouldn't just call it pampering," said Blair. "I've been told that in fast water work they need—"

Big Jim flared up.

"Say now, —— burn my brand if I ain't fed up o' hearin' what that blasted gorilla o' yourn tells yuh 'bout how to run this expedish! I'll tell yuh what's more. I'm fed up on him too! Yuh'd think he was yer pardner 'stead of us, the way he acts up!"

Blair was all too prone to enter into wordy argument. But not, even in his own country, across a public dining table. Here he felt that something of the prestige of his race rested upon his shoulders. All that he said, therefore, was:

"It was not the River Cat who told me that. It was somebody else who knew enough to give him credit. And please don't shout."

The soft answer, coupled with a continuous covert kicking by Pete, was effective in turning away wrath, and Jim subsided into the mutterings of a discomfited bear. But Blair knew that his resentment at the dwarf's off-hand attitude had settled down to a definite issue and he felt that the issue had been only averted. Once again the disquieting thought about holding the position of a boss assailed him.

Tehiu, marked on the government map as a settlement of considerable size near the mouth of the Rio Juruá, they found to to be an adobe village of some twenty houses on a high clay bluff fronting the river. Almost a seaport village, for the farther bank of the Amazon was away below the muggy horizon. Blair was interested to ask what was the reason for Tehiu's existence; there was no industry and it was not a collecting point for river trade. He could discover none. Except, they told him, here the bank was above the monsoon floods, and the ants were not bad. Little enough reason, yet ominously illustrative of the country they were coming into.

At Tehiu they transhipped, for the river steamer went on to Fonte Boa, a real town of almost three hundred souls. From Tehiu there was a theoretical service as far as Breu on the Juruá in the dry season. But neither passenger traffic nor trade justified a regular run for a river steamer. This was the very threshold of the wilderness.

On the Juruá the desultory trade that had survived the demise of the rubber industry was carried on by *batelão* and launch. Blair struck a bargain for passage with a man who operated a little wood-burning launch. The man was arranging to go up to the settlements of a couple of trader men, towing their *batelãos*, lashed on either side of his boat. Blair's application for passage and food was an unheard-of piece of luck, and he immediately charged the greenhorn an unheard-of price.

Passagem com rancho for three gringos and a *moço* would be fifteen milreis per day. That was nearly two dollars, and was twice as much as he was charging the trader men. The greenhorn was not so green that he did not suspect the universal tendency to mulct the stranger within the gates. He said nothing, but waited for his partners, who boasted so much river experience, to raise an objection. But never a chirp came from either hearty Big Jim or clever Pete. Either they did not know or, since there was no hope of a rake-off for them, they did not care. Blair could not tell which. But his was not one of those egocentric natures that can not abide the thought of being cheated even of seventy-five cents a day. He was content to say nothing and to be glad of the chance to get a lift under any conditions at all until opportunity should arise to buy his own boat.

In this connection clever Pete held a long conversation with one of the traders and must have arrived at some arrangement satisfactory to himself. For he came to

Blair and told him that the man was willing to sell his boat, and that here was a splendid opportunity to acquire their own craft and to open up their own food supplies, which would be vastly preferable to the beans and fish fare provided on the launch under the arrangement for *rancho*, and they would be independent, then, of further expense.

An admirable suggestion from whatever angle it was regarded. But the River Cat was vehement in his denunciation of it, and he drew Blair aside to point an object lesson from the very craft in question.

"Look, padrão, at the knowledge of the rivers which those two gringos have not. These boats are large and well built of strong planks, as the gringos say. Yet for our journey they will not serve. Look, their bottoms are of planks, too, which will open out so, like my five fingers, among the rocks of the rapids which we must travel. A *batelão* for rapids must be built of planks added to a bottom consisting of a whole tree trunk hewn out like a canoe which can not open out."

Armed with this more than merely plausible argument, Blair returned to laugh at Pete.

"Well, what do you say to that, you who know so much about river travel?"

Pete for once was at a loss for a smooth explanation. He tried to hedge by saying that he had seen those dugout-bottom boats, but that he didn't think so much of them personally. Though he was willing to admit that the Indian might have a certain amount of right in his contention. Yet he, for his part, didn't know where such a boat could be acquired, particularly since they were now reaching a point where traders' *sitios* were few and far between.

But the River Cat spread his great hands and clicked his tongue and insisted that in another day's time they would be coming to a place where the trader who had located there had a *batelão* just such as they needed; and that there was an extreme probability that his wife would be a widow and would be glad to sell the boat; and if not there, then there was a last place yet farther up where the wife would surely sell.

AND sure enough, when they arrived at that place on the next day, the two trader men on the boat were shocked to hear that their *compadre* was no more. And, just as the River Cat had prophesied, the stricken wife was only too glad to dispose of his effects and to get out of that desolate place.

The *batelão* was a stout boat, built of hand-hewn planks of *itauba* wood, which is as everlasting as teak; and what would have been its keel strake and eighteen inches on either side was in effect a dugout canoe of *luiru* wood of a springy grain which when wet is almost elastic. Thirty feet long it was, with the after half roofed over with a high hood of palm leaf thatch over cane hoops and the forward half decked with split cane to form seats for the paddle men.

An ideal boat, built expressly for work in rapid water. The woman asked four hundred and fifty milreis of the gringo for it, and the gringo smiled and paid without a murmur. When the transaction had finally been concluded and when even Big Jim and Pete had expressed their satisfaction with it, Blair demanded of his prophetic *moço* how he had ventured to guess that it might be a part of the estate of one deceased. The dwarf grinned up at him gnomishly.

"Padrão, that was simple," he explained. "A year ago I was in this water, and the word on the river was that this man who traded yet higher up among the Xibaue people was paying too much attention to their women. So it seemed to me that in a year's time it was likely that his wife would be a widow, for the Xibaue are no down-river Indians."

A simple explanation indeed, and a wholesome moral was to be drawn therefrom. The distinction between down-river and up-river was one of more than just a name and a few local boundaries.

So there at the *sitio* of the man who had failed to recognize that distinction the little party transferred their goods and their gear and their voluminous baggage into their own ship, stowing the perishable goods, such as cloth and hardware and cartridges and *pirarucu*, under the thatched roof where the night dews, heavy as light rain, could not get at them.

The launch owner, disgruntled at losing thus unexpectedly his lucrative fares, insisted that he could never tow three heavy *batelãos* against the current and would have left them there to their own devices. But the River Cat appealed to Blair most urgently to persuade the man by hook or crook to take them farther.

"What sort of a crew can I get here?" he

demanded. "The men of this place are women. Trader's Indians, well tamed and spiritless. Let the *blanco* take us but today's full journey farther to the *igarapé* Mari-marié. Up that creek there live men."

So Blair reasoned with the launchman, and the latter, for a further exorbitant consideration, agreed to tow the *batelão* as far as the *igarapé*. It was approaching late afternoon when they reached at a broad creek that oozed sluggishly out of a wall of dense jungle, and the launchman ran them skillfully on to the sand spit at its mouth and cast off their line.

They were at last alone and dependent upon their own resources and they found themselves to be suddenly very helpless and bewildered.

A hundred things seemed to be their immediate necessities. Mooring their craft. Food. Shelter. Cooking arrangements. And finally a crew of paddle men to propel their newly acquired boat against the stiff current. Blair's expertly advised list of goods, of course, included all the necessary equipment. But, even though one may have the necessary gear and may have seen all these things done a hundred times, an ordered camp does not arise of its own volition out of the mere possession of the essentials. Blair always counted, as has been said, on picking up his experience as he went along. But these other two, the boasted river men! Where was their vaunted familiarity with getting things down to a smooth working basis? No helpful suggestion was forthcoming. They were as bewildered as Blair.

There seems to persist in the best of men or, at all events, in those whose primitive urge for the outdoors has not been entirely eradicated through the ages—and who shall say that these are not of the very best—there seems to persist in these a subtle hang-over of a still earlier primal urge—the desire, at times, for solitude. Otherwise, why is it that men, and the very best of them, at that, who have traveled in close and enforced contact with one another for quite a while inevitably begin to wear upon each other's nerves?

When to this regular and recognized wear is added the circumstance of travel in discomfort and with poor food, the condition becomes acute. Blair's partners, accordingly, had worn upon his nerves to the extent that he was sufficiently chastened in mood to admit that the consul at Manaos had perhaps been right in his diagnosis of those two. That they were—well, men who lived by their wits. And in his present mood he was willing to admit what he had persistently closed his eyes to hitherto—that they were, to put it charitably, not over particular just what muddy channels the exercise of their wits might lead them into. His embittered introspection went yet further. As he now sized his friends up, their conception of a partnership was to keep an unswerving eye upon the interest of number one. If number one and number two might benefit together, there was no objection. But number one ran without compromise in the far lead. His final admission to himself was that in this combination he was most indubitably number three.

All of which chastened acknowledgment, while it did not any way tend to alleviate Blair's discomfort, was very good for his soul. For a correlative incident to Blair's happy faculty of picking up his experience as he went along was that he was one of those who had to learn his lessons through experience.

Experience was coming to him in good measure just now. He liked it no more than anybody likes hard experience. But he had made his own bed—though contrary to the conclusion of the proverb, the choice did still remain with him, as to whether he would lie in it or whether he would, before leaving the last contact with civilization, turn and go back. He was in the familiar old position of having started something. He thought of his uncle's passionless criticism of his character and, with the thought, cursed him. He'd be —— if he'd quit now and go back to face that thin smile of cynical told-you-so. Particularly would he be a hundred times —— if he would go back to an enforced acceptance of a job, perhaps in a office.

A decision as pig-headed as was to be expected of Blair. Pity, indeed, it was that there was nobody to agree with him and back him up in his decision and thereby elevate it from the obloquy of pig-headedness to the dignity of firm resolve, for the difference in terminology is surely no more than one of agreement, or otherwise, with the policy involved.

Though there was another condition which might have a bearing on the verdict

as to whether Blair was acting as a strong man of indomitable will or whether he was merely the desperate victim of enforced circumstances. His expenditures on the grubstake that he was putting up for his bold gamble with fate for the life he loved against the life he hated—what with the quality of trade goods that he had bought and the gringo freight rates that he had paid—had piled up to more than he dared to calculate, and with his purchase of a boat as the final stake in the gamble he had, so to speak, burned his boats behind him.

All that he had now was in that *batelão* that rested on her nose on the sand spit of the *igarapé* Mari-marié, not even moored yet to any solid object against the suck of the insidious current under her stern. All things considered, it was excusable that he was in a mood keyed up to the flash point when he set about hauling at the confusion of gear which piled on itself in the boat. Not overpatiently he shouted:

"Hey, what about lending a hand here to get this rope out? Are the *moço* and I the only two workers in this outfit? You, Jim, get a hold of this end and make fast to something."

There spoke hot-headed Blair. What he was not taking into consideration was the possibility that he may have worn upon the nerves of the other two just as much as they on his. That was just what had been his trouble in his uncle's office, what had started those arguments with salesmen and buyers. Justified or no, Blair had started an argument now.

But it was far from an office this time, where neat and exact employees had been schooled in order and repression and where a wholesome fear of the power within the inner sanctum maintained a curb upon feelings that tended to go farther than words.

Big Jim had nursed one grievance after another ever since the first shock of having been cheated of the anticipated orgy of buying. He had nursed them along, curbed partly by Pete's admonitory kicks and partly by a wholesome fear of the power within the sanctum of a law court, and when he passed beyond the reach of law, by the presence of witnesses who might possibly be produced in a law court. Now he was free of all these restraining influences. They were alone on the sand spit of a desolate creek. Just the three of them and a naked grotesque of an Indian. There was no longer any need to be "hearty Big Jim." His answer was a surly introduction of the first of his grievances.

"Seein' the way things was shapin', I allowed as how yuh preferred to work with yer naked Indian man rather'n with yer partners."

The long smoldering argument was upon Blair, smoking hot and fuming to burst into flame. It had been his uncle's gibe that, while Blair started it, the other fellow always had his way. It was true too in the office. Possibly because Blair, also, had felt that curbing influence. His answer to Big Jim was free of any sort of repression.

"I worked with him because he was the only one who worked. What did you do to help load our gear into this boat?"

Big Jim's florid countenance flushed deeper under the thrust. He had, as a matter of fact, loafed deliberately and nursed his grouch. He had no excuse, and he made none.

"Well, an' I'll tell yuh why. If yuh figures yer nigger that-a-much top hand 'at yuh goes to him for every say-so on how to run this expedish,'n if he's that swelled up over it 'at he won't take no orders f'm me, I don't work along side o' him. No, nor Pete neether. So now yuh got it straight."

This was rebellion, flat and unequivocal. Blair flared up.

"I suppose you're both afraid he'll show you up for the big bluffs that you are. And he isn't a nigger. And if he was—" with reckless heat— "he'd be a —— sight better man to work alongside of than you, anyway."

Big Jim was one of those slow-minded discredits to his country whose racial pride could accept any contumely rather than comparison with the colored brother. With his shouted oath at Blair he flashed a look over his shoulder at Pete, as if for instructions. Clever Pete, since he also stood in the line of Blair's vision, remained noncommittally, immobile. But that was encouragement enough for Big Jim. With another oath he rushed at Blair.

Blair, in his existing mood, felt a sudden surge of fierce satisfaction that the thing had come to a head. Satisfaction, too, that there was no uncompromising figure in an inner office to restrain or hamper. Now the matter could be settled definitely

and for all time. There would be no rankling hang-over. His position as boss of the expedition would be established in the only way that it could be established with satisfaction over a brace of men like his two partners. It was good that this thing had happened.

He met Big Jim with wide-spread feet on the loose sand and a stiff left fist in the throat which stopped the bull charge and left them both face to face for a fraction of a surprized moment—Blair, because his clean punch with all his hundred and eighty-odd pounds behind it had not knocked the other off his feet, and Big Jim, because he had never suspected that Blair could hit so hard.

Jim swallowed spasmodically and choked forth:

"Blast yuh! I'll mark yuh for that!"

And he fell from the wild rush of his first rage into a defensive crouch which showed that he was master of his anger and not inexperienced in argument that has flared beyond hot words.

It was then that Blair realized that he had a fight on his hands. He himself knew perhaps just a trifle more about the science of boxing than comes to any youth of athletic tendencies who has not spent all of his time at college on study. He was rather better than the average all-round athlete. But swimming was his long suit, not boxing. Even so, he would have been, with his height and weight, more than a good match for any man, however big, who knew nothing about boxing at all. But Big Jim showed in his well-covered crouch, in the easy weave of his open hands, in his wary eye that somewhere or other he had picked up more than just the rough and tumble methods of a bar-room fighter.

Decidedly, Blair's hotheadedness had started something this time. This was going to be a fight. Big Jim was bigger and heavier than he all around. It was going to be, very possibly, a losing fight.

ALL of these things came home to Blair in just that fractional moment while they stood eye to eye. The only advantage that he could see for himself was that he was quicker in his movements and in much better condition. Not very much advantage, when not backed by superior skill, to count against some thirty pounds of extra weight. Blair had started something this time that was not going to be easy to finish. Curiously enough, his only reaction was to curse his uncle.

"—— you, I'll show you," he muttered through set teeth.

"Yuh will, huh?"

Big Jim took the challenge to himself. And he stepped in with a heavy lead low to the body. Blair was able to drop his elbow to stop it, as he was also able to throw up his other arm to intercept the ponderous swing to his head which followed. The man was slow. Slower than he had dared to hope. He shot in his own left to the other's face before the heavy guard could swing up and stepped clear to the right, and swore softly again.

This time at his luck. With his superior speed he might be able to keep out of serious harm and with his superior stamina he might wear the big fellow down. But, curse upon it, the loose surface of that sun-scorched sand spit had a terribly neutralizing effect on his advantage of speed. Still, as the other plowed forward again, he contrived to shift so that the low afternoon sun shone into his opponent's eyes, and seized the opportunity to slug left and right hard into his face.

Big Jim bellowed, rushed again, and the sand spurted under his heel with the effort of his smash for the body. Blair saw it coming in plenty of time. But the sand impeded his retreat. The blow landed low over his heart with but half its weight, yet heavily enough to drive a grunt from him and to show him how powerful that big bull of a man really was. His own counter to the face was automatic, and he retreated again, his eyes growing big with apprehension.

Experience was coming to him in hard lumps again. If only he had not been so impetuous! Away at the far end of that glaring tongue of sand was what looked like a little level of hard ground. He had already noted it as a possible site for the camp. If only he had stalled off that first rush and taken the fight to that spot he could have made the most of such advantages as he had!

And how he needed every last ounce of everything he had just then! The apprehension in his eyes widened to desperation. Not at the possibility of being licked by a big bruiser. He was fighting for more than

just personal satisfaction or prestige. His boat. His grubstake. His whole gamble against fate for his future—if there was going to be any future. It was alarmingly patent to him that he fought alone on that desolate sand spit at the edge of the trackless jungle. He knew that his partners coveted that grubstake, and he knew them to be not overweighted with scruples. If that big ox brute should, by sheer weight, batter him into insensibility—

With a hoarse shout he hurled himself at Big Jim's hulk. A clean and hard left over the growling mouth lifted the head and jaw clear of the protection behind the shoulder that the crouching position afforded. And then Blair swung his right over and upward with all the force of his arm and body and leg.

Force enough there was in the blow to have knocked out any world's champion—if Blair had possessed skill enough or had been lucky enough to plant it at the precise spot on the angle of the jaw from where it might communicate its benumbing jar to the base of the brain. But he did not possess that skill and he was not traveling with luck just then. His fist smashed, instead of on the jaw, low on the left cheek bone and ripped a gash to the outer corner of the eye. It staggered Big Jim. Shook him so that for a moment his knees sagged and his hands dropped. Had Blair been on a firm footing, he might, with luck, have braced himself to land another and a decisive blow. But that treacherous sand! That shifty floor of his ill-advised arena!

The priceless moment of opportunity passed, and Big Jim, with a bellow of rage that was half a groan, lurched into a closed clinch.

It is in a body to body hug of that sort that thirty pounds of extra beef and bones makes itself felt. The big man wrapped his great arms round Blair and leaned all his weight upon him while his head cleared.

Blair could feel the warm blood from the gash, that he had laid open on the other's cheek, dripping down the back of his neck, and he knew that this was his last chance to enlarge his temporary advantage to victory. He struggled furiously to free his arms and to get in those shot body punches that are so effective in close fighting. But the other knew how to hold a clinch, and he hung on unscathed. And presently, as his dizziness passed, he began to pound in heavy body blows of his own—short, telling smashes over the ribs and kidneys that drew gasps from Blair and weakened his knees.

And with that Blair found that he was fighting under yet another disadvantage. While he instinctively adhered to the rules which he had governed the friendly glove contests at high school and college, Big Jim, having been to neither, was under no such handicap. He fought no rules at all. He hit how and where he could and he used the heel or the elbow or the knee as occasion offered. The dizziness that had been Jim's was now enveloping Blair. Only the horrid remembrance of his utter aloneness kept him on his feet and struggling against the fate that went with defeat.

Big Jim was panting with his effort. But he was able to spit the blood from his mouth and grin—

"Now I've got yuh, my bucko."

He reached round and jerked down a dragging blow over Blair's kidneys, and then as Blair's knees went limp, he threw his weight forward and fell to the ground on top of him. Blair tried to roll from under, but the bulk above him dug his knees into the sand and remained anchored like a derrick. With a thick forearm across Blair's throat he snatched a fist free and crashed into his face.

This was killing punching. A head ground into the hot sand with no give behind it required only a few such blows to pound the face into a pulp. Hazily Blair could see in the drawn-back lips that snarled above him and in the blood-suffused eyes the fighting lust that grips a low mentality to beat a helpless opponent into complete insensibility and perhaps to the limit of life. In a last desperation he threw his arms round the bull neck above him and dragged the brute face down close to protect his own, and so hung on, hoping for nothing.

Big Jim ground his teeth and panted hot oaths as he strained to free himself. Blair felt a surge of sudden hope that perhaps he was choking him, and gripped his arms the tighter with his last remaining strength.

Then a shriek cut the air. A sudden strangled scream of warning.

"My ——, the nigger! Look out, Jim, for the Indian!"

It was Pete, standing at a distance and screaming with wide terror in his eyes. So compelling was the note that both men, locked in their embrace, stiffened and

strained their heads round to look in the direction where he pointed.

There, between them and the stranded boat, like a gnarled and stunted tree, black against the sun, stood the River Cat, his knotted legs bowed wide apart, massive naked torso tensed forward, eyes glinting as cold as black marbles above his great hand which held a short cane tube to his lips.

The animal battle lust in Big Jim's face was transformed in an instant to an animal fear of equal intensity. His clutching muscles relaxed and, with a hoarse croak of affright, he hurled himself off from Blair and crabbed along the sand on his hip and hand in a series of plunging heaves, holding an arm protectively raised before his face as a futile shield and to shut out the horrid sight, yet not daring to get up and turn his back upon it to run.

Blair sat up dizzily and found time to collect his wits and his breath while the dwarf still sighted menacingly along his tube after Big Jim, who continued to shuffle himself over the sand till he thought he was sufficiently out of range to risk a leap to his feet and a zigzag rush away to the far edge of the jungle where Pete stood, ready to dash into the cover of the undergrowth. The dwarf lowered his compelling tube from his lips and, on a sudden, his whole face broke out into his gnomish grin.

"That gringo knows nothing about anything," he said, as one repeating a well established axiom. "I could still reach him easily from here."

"What is that wonderful thing?" Blair asked him, though he half knew.

The dwarf held the innocuous looking piece of cane up for inspection and chuckled at his own cleverness.

"I am Ohkohthithero of the rivers," he said. "All the peoples of the upper rivers use the *zarabatan* as long as a tall man and a half. But I have seen the *blancos* and their ways. Therefore, as the trader *blancos* carry a short gun with which to shoot people who are close, so have I made me a show blow tube which is easy to carry with my paddle and my cooking pot."

IT WAS then that Blair remembered weapons, and looked hastily to where his partners stood together in uncertainty, white in the sun against the black green of the jungle. But guns, thank Providence, along with everything else, were still in the *batelão*. The River Cat made a cheerful suggestion.

"Padrão, let me shoot at that gringo now. We do not need him for any purpose at all. Nor that little *blanco*. They are both quite useless. Just a scratch to each of them, padrão."

Blair stood up, a little shaky on his feet, but firm. He felt tenderly at his purpling forehead while he frowned at the two figures who knew so little of jungle craft as to offer so splendid a mark.

"No," he told the dwarf shortly. "It is against custom."

That was an argument which the Indian could understand.

"If it is against custom, then, of course, it can not be. Yet it is a bad custom."

His acceptance of the verdict of *costumbre* was final. Yet he put his tube away, not where it had lain hidden with his tiny bundle of belongings in the *batelão*, but thrust it with his knife through the cord of his gee string at his back.

In a flash Blair's mind was made up. His first impulse, of course, had been the natural one of taking possession of all the firearms in the *batelão*, thus maintaining an ascendancy over the others. But he was no gun expert, and he shrank from the thought of the eternal vigilance that such a course would require of him. Now a fantastic and misshapen god seemed to have stepped out of the machine for his benefit. He laughed crookedly and slowly walked across the sand to his partners and, without preamble, told them:

"Now, you two, both of you, will lend a hand to make that boat fast and to unload gear for setting up camp. Your share, no more and no less. But just remember one thing. Don't play around with any fool idea about gun play with that Indian. If either of you touches a gun, I turn him loose on you. So come along."

High-handed talk from a man who had just been on the verge of being beaten in a fight. But Blair had seen the terror in Big Jim's eyes when that little cane tube was pointing at his face. He knew more than ever now the vital need of taking command right from the outset of their travel together, and he felt as secure in giving his orders as if he were a sheriff backed by a deputy gunman. Perhaps more so, for Big Jim might have taken a desperate chance against a gunman; he was no coward.

But there was an unholy deadliness about that silent little tube that could put a chill upon any man's spine.

Every white man in the Amazon country has heard a hundred stories about the awful potency of the blow-gun poison. Few have seen one in action. The sudden confronting with this uncanny weapon added all the shock of surprize to its already murderous reputation. It was as if a thug, thinking to beat up a defenseless citizen, had found himself face to face with a sawed-off shotgun.

And the thing was as hideously efficacious. It was small. It could be whipped from behind and brought to the lips as fast as a pistol could be brought into play. The thin sliver of reed, tufted with tree cotton and tipped with the far-fabled *uirari* poison, was always in place. A puff. A scratch. And ten seconds would be the limit of life.

Neither Big Jim nor Pete entertained for a moment any thought of resistance. At all events, not open resistance. But the mental reservations with which they submitted to the condition was another matter, and their respective responses were most useful warnings of what might be expected of them in the future. Big Jim remained surly. He shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Well, I guess yuh hold the cards pardner," he growled. "But I shore had yuh beat afore yuh drawed that blasted black ace."

His was the gross type of mind to which the only argument that appealed was force. "To the victor the spoils" was his unspoken creed. A fight was to him one of the simple occurrences of life. Every once in so often conditions arose which necessitated a personal encounter. One fought and, if victorious, seized the utmost personal benefit. If vanquished, one hoped for as little personal loss as might be possible. A force greater than his own had vanquished him, and his tendency was to accept the condition for just as long as it might be able to maintain its superiority. He was able to adjust himself to defeat even with a rough philosophy of making the best of it.

Pete was smoother. He had not fought. He never fought. But the discomfiture of his catspaw had none the less upset his fond hopes of cruising the rivers as master of a princely trading outfit with a big strong-arm dupe to do his heavy arguing for him. Though not exactly upset, for Pete was a gentleman of fertile brain. In clever Pete's thoughts the realization of his hopes was merely postponed. His chief asset in his own mind just now was that he had not been implicated in the fight. He had wisely stood aloof. Therefore, Pete felt that his rôle might be that of peacemaker. His attitude of regretful deprecation came to him without effort.

"Gentlemen, my partners," he said suavely. "This affair has been a pity, a great pity. Of course, I do not feel that I have any right to butt in on an argument between two gentlemen. But I am sure that both of you will very presently be in a frame of mind to admit that both have been hasty. As an impartial observer—" clever little Pete!—"I can see the fault on both sides. Now why can't we wipe this incident off the slate and continue as we have come so far—good partners all working together for our common good?"

He threw out his hands, palms uppermost, and smiled with tentative benevolence upon the late combatants.

"Hm," thought Blair to himself, "that's the one that'll want watching." Then aloud and not any too conciliatingly, "Seems to me that's what we scrapped over, because we weren't working all together."

Big Jim's wits were not equal to analyzing Pete's subtleties. He felt that the onus of blame was being piled upon his shoulders. He shuffled his big feet and growled:

"Well, ——, I ain't got no kick agin my end o' work. But that Injun shore done got under my hide like a sheep tick."

Pete looked dubiously at Blair, and past him at the Indian, who stood scratching a twisted knee without bending and watching all three with the same screwed-up expression and wise eyes of an ape that almost understands. Blair settled further discussion by saying bruskly:

"Well, for Mike's sake come ahead and work then. There's enough to do."

He swung on his heel and plowed through the sand toward the *batelão*, and the others followed, not, as might have been expected, muttering to one another. A tiny rift had appeared. Jim felt that Pete had willfully put him in the wrong, and Pete had not yet decided how to square himself. He realized that he had made an error, but he was content to leave the correcting of it to his own shrewdness.

THE work of making their first camp progressed after that almost with alacrity. There was a certain constraint, of course, between Blair and Big Jim, but both felt the instinct of making concessions toward reconciliation. Jim lent his willing weight toward shoving the *batelão* nose off the sand and hauling it round closer to the jungle edge, where a rope could conveniently be made fast to a tree. They all burrowed to find needful equipment and to carry it to the spot selected for their tent. Blair was driving tent pegs while Pete held up the pole when Jim bellowed from the boat.

"Hey, tell yer blasted Injun tah shift these rifles. I gotta dig out a frying pan."

Blair thought swiftly. It seemed to him that the loud and ostentatious tone indicated indignation at restraint rather than rancor.

"Go ahead and shift them yourself," he shouted without looking round.

As a matter of fact, he had told the River Cat nothing about standing guard over the other two white men. His action now was the normal impulse of a white man not to rub it in; and in taking the risk that he did, he felt that he might rely on the quick vigilance of the Indian to forestall any treachery. Had he been a keen psychologist he could have done no better. Big Jim moved the rifles and got the pan and, when he brought it, his manner was not as surly as it had been.

Camp progressed. The hundred and one little confusions of a first bivouac were ironed out. The omissions which necessitated a dozen trips back and forth from the boat were filled. A meal was prepared, rice and fish and chili peppers, which the partners sprinkled liberally with *farinha* and ate in constrained silence and without appetite. It was the identical, so often cursed *rancho* food of the launch with the one added luxury of plantains baked in ashes to serve as bread.

They were learning, these three, that the much despised launch had supplied, after all, pretty well the best that the country of the lower rivers afforded. Meat? One could have it if one carried it in tin cans or if one could shoot it. Potatoes were imported into Manaos from Europe and arrived eighty per cent. bad. Vegetables? The ants ate up everything that had any nourishment in it with the exception of the poisonous mandioca yam. This was what was meant by that familiar term, "living off the country." As they finished their meal the sun dropped behind the tree fringe across the river and darkness came down like a blanket.

When darkness comes in the jungle there is little to do but go to sleep, for the lamp has not been devised that can provide any sort of light efficiently when far from sources of civilized and specialized fuels. The only question of importance then becomes—

"Are there any wild animals hereabout?"

The River Cat grinned amusedly at the question.

"Padrão, this is flood country. How can there be any animals?"

The answer was entirely illogical. Yet he seemed to be so confident and the white men were so tired after a strenuous day, as two of them surely had a right to be, that they were content to waive elucidation and roll into their blankets which the swift night chill of the river after the blazing tropical day rendered gratefully inviting.

Blair slept with an easy mind. He had not at any time worried much over the thought of wild animals slinking treacherously upon him in the dark. But during the last few days, as he had seen the tension growing, he had thought often and uneasily about the enforced relaxation of vigilance in sleep with the two men whom he had taken unto himself for protection in the jungle. Yet, after today's happenings he gave himself to rest with as much confidence on the score of human treachery as of animal. He knew that he had in some way secured the loyalty of this queer River Cat person and he knew that the man would sleep with the jungle-bred wariness of the feline tribe; that no move could be made within the tent but that he would be on the alert. And finally he knew that both of his partners had absorbed a very wholesome fear of this naked savage who might very well, despite his stunted legs, have disposed of Big Jim, even without a blow gun.

It is a pity that guardians of civilized peace can not work on the principle that fear of a swift death is the most potent deterrent to violence. Morning arose upon that tent, which contained all the elements of robbery with murder, as peacefully as upon a harmonious little family outing. The breakfast, despite the monotony of fare, fish and plantains and rice, passed

without even an angry word. In brooding silence, as a matter of fact. The only member of the party who seemed to be entirely satisfied with the meal was the River Cat. After yesterday's sterling service Blair had all unconsciously issued a blanket invitation to all to sit in, and the Indian had just as unconsciously accepted a situation, the parallel of which probably did not exist in all Amazonas. To eat with white men seemed in no way incongruous to him who had remained all his life hitherto a masterless man, and to his starved Indian taste this was princely provender. He ate enormously and, having wiped his fingers clean in his mop of hair, announced with extraordinary cheerfulness—

"Now I go to gather a crew of paddlemen who are men."

Blair looked at him with doubtful calculation, wondering whether he could dare to let his stout ally depart. Yet a crew was a *sine qua non* if he intended to persist in the gamble against fate upon which he had embarked. Fate, in the meanwhile, seemed to be introducing new and puissant cards into the game at each turn. To the Indian Blair said:

"How are you going to fetch a crew? How far up this creek do these Marié people live? You couldn't hack your way through that jungle ten kilometers in a whole day."

The dwarf flexed his great arms and stretched his shoulders till the muscles cracked and laughed.

"I am Ohkohthithero of the rivers. All ways in the rivers are waterways. I swim. In one day I return with a crew in canoes. Yet time will be saved to me if padrão will shoot for me that caiman that sleeps on the sand across the creek there."

Another thought came to Blair.

"I can shoot that one, yes. But in this slow running warm water won't there be other caimans? What of them?"

The dwarf laughed again with delight to show the things that he knew.

"Nay, padrão, that little one is nothing. Surely there will be other caimans in this *igarapé*. Big ones. But I will rub my body with the oil that comes from the sides of that one, and the others then will not know my smell from their own kind."

It sounded fantastic and seemed a slim protection indeed from a hungry alligator. Yet the man seemed to be so carelessly confident. Blair felt that in the face of such cool courage his own hesitation would stand up and assail him to his everlasting shame. Soberly and slowly he went to the *batelão* and got his rifle.

IT WAS an easy shot that he could not miss, and the old stories about the difficulty of killing an alligator have been exploded by modern high velocity so-called explosive bullets. The copper-jacketed shell struck the sleeping reptile just forward of the eye and tore the whole front of its head nearly off so that the ugly snout flapped over and hung by a shred.

Before its tail had ceased to churn up water and sand the River Cat had reached the other side of the creek and Blair could hear his grunts as he sawed at the creature's horny side skin with his knife. Squatting there by the water's edge in the shadow of the overhanging woods like some misbegotten imp of the inner jungle performing a demoniac rite, he ripped out lumps of the strong musky-smelling yellow fat and greased his body thoroughly with the foul stuff. Then he swam back with fewer strokes than seemed to be humanly possible, and the only other preparation that he made for his long jouney was to tie his sawed-off blow-gun carefully into his hair.

"*Até logo*, padrão," he said. "Till one full day. Six strong men I will bring. I will promise them three fish-hooks each for every day or a little round mirror for four days or a knife for ten days. I have only one word. Those two gringos are evil men. I have hidden their guns in the *batelão* under the *pirarucu*."

With that he rolled, rather than waded, into the water and showed off his skill in a burst of phenomenal speed. Blair remained standing on the shore, looking after him and thinking many things. The thought that crowded first and strongest, of course, was the urgent need of coming to a decision as to the course he was to take. Now that his stout henchman had gone, he stood entirely alone, to do whatever he would do without the potent support of that compelling blow-gun. He was in better case than he had been before, as a matter of fact. A reassuring condition had developed out of yesterday's events. Whatever the other two might contemplate, they would not dare to murder him. For the two of them could not handle the *batelão*,

and when the River Cat returned with a crew of six strong men there they would still be. Blair did not think that they would care to face the resultant war, even though they might be in possession of their rifles.

The easier and weaker course would be to rest upon that security. An easier one yet would be to issue the simple order to the crew to paddle downstream again to where safe and sane river steamers plied and to abandon the crazy hope that a man who had proved to be unfitted for a job in an office could win a gamble against fate.

At that thought Blair scowled and cursed his uncle. An alternative, such as Bill Blair of the office days would eagerly have dallied with, was to stow all other weapons carefully out of reach and to swing his own revolver at his hip and so to maintain himself as boss of his own expedition.

That was a thought worthy of serious consideration. Yet consideration immediately brought out a score of serious drawbacks. Endless vigilance, burning resentment, ceaseless plotting, defenselessness at a time when the swift need might arise of three men back to back with weapons in their hands. No, that would be an impossible way to conduct an expedition. Blair's frown became a ferocious mask as he turned and stared for long minutes across the sand at the camp where the two stood talking together. At last he drew a deep breath and exhaled slowly through wide nostrils, and then, with set white lips and just a spot of color high on either cheek, he walked to face the other two. It was to Big Jim that he addressed himself.

"The Indian has gone," he said.

Jim looked at him uncomprehendingly. Blair amplified.

"With his blow-gun."

Still Jim did not understand.

"Well, what about it?" he wanted to know in a sulky growl.

Blair surveyed the level firm ground upon which the tent stood. It was hard enough and dry enough to afford him the fullest use of the natural advantages that he had so terribly missed yesterday. In a hard, dry voice he said:

"Jim, there's got to be a boss over this expedition, over any expedition. A man whose say-so goes. You or I, Jim. I'll fight you for it. Here and now."

Jim looked at him in sudden surprize and with quick, narrow suspicion in his eyes. He looked at the hard level ground with practised calculation, his expression none too confident. Then, by long habit, he looked at Pete. Pete, in full view of Blair, cleverly refrained from making any move at all, bodily or facial. Aloof and noncommittal, he did not even look up at Pete. The big man felt deserted by the guiding intelligence. His heavy face became resentful. This was the second time that Pete had let him down. He shuffled uncomfortably while his eyes looked this way and that, anywhere except at Blair. At last he blurted:

"Aw ——, I ain't hankering for no job as foreman. What's the use o' scrappin' over it?" Then with a sudden resumption of belligerence, "But if yuh think yuh got me bluffed, pardner, I'm game tuh—"

"I don't," said Blair quickly. "And I'll say I'm plenty glad you don't see any use in scrapping over it. Very well then, it's between me and Pete."

Mr. Kuyumjian looked up with startled apprehension at this sudden home-coming of his plotting.

"Why, how absurd, Mr. Blair," he professed his loyalty. "Of course, you are the leader of your own expedition."

Blair regarded him with a curling lip. He turned his back and spoke to the other.

"All right then, Jim, let's go and get that mess of gear in the boat straightened out so we'll be ready to go when our crew comes without any more piffling around." With the relief of the tension he was able to grin. "By the way, the Indian hid your rifle under the *pirarucu* bale."

Big Jim's ready belligerence flared.

"The —— he did! Well, he can gosh durned well fish 'em out himself. Yeah, an' clean 'em too. I ain't gonna burrow under that muck." And as a grumbling afterthought, "Less'n maybe we stick the Syriac on to that job."

Blair laughed outright. He beckoned clever Pete and together they went down to the *batelão*.

And that was how Bill Blair became boss of his own expedition.

ANOTHER night passed in camp, this time the three white men alone, with no lynx-eared jungle Indian to keep a light-sleeping vigil. Yet Blair felt that he could sleep in security. Pete, however much he

might covet the princely trading outfit, would never have courage enough to attempt any sort of physical treachery single-handed, and Big Jim, while a heavy-witted animal, was at all events animal enough to feel a rough sort of respect for another male who had put up a good fight and, vice versa, a resentful scorn for the weakling who not only dared not to fight at all, but was, over and above that, too pusillanimous even to back him up openly.

Blair's security was justified as far his partners were concerned. But the feebleness of their security from outside sources was brought home to all of them with a start when they woke up in the morning and, stepping out of the tent, saw the River Cat with the promised six strong men squatting in a silent semicircle, each man with a spear thrust into the ground before him.

Sturdy fellows they were, with the thin legs and muscular upper bodies of a people who spent half their lives in canoes. They seemed to have no form of greeting, no recognition of the munificent master who was hiring them for the generous sum of three fish-hooks per day or its cumulative equivalent in hardware. They remained squatting dumbly, holding their spear shafts close before their faces in the direct central line between their eyes in order to avert any overlaying of witchcraft upon them by the white men. The River Cat introduced them.

"These two want machetes, padrão, and that one a piece of cloth for his woman who will go back with the canoe, and the others, knives. Their language is Marieta, but they understand Geral of the rivers."

"Good," said Blair. "You are the *capitão* of these men. Pay them in advance for good will and make them understand how many days each thing is worth. When will they be ready to start?"

The River Cat grinned delightedly at the title and the responsibility that had been bestowed upon him.

"They are ready now. As soon as padrão has eaten they will start. These are good boatmen. I will take them and give them the knives."

He grunted to them and led them off, looking like a gorilla leading its captors rather than a proud *capitão*, the manager and navigating officer of a princely *batelão*.

After a gobbled breakfast, *farinha* and fish and rice, the white men went down to the boat and found that the new crew were boatmen indeed. They had lashed their canoe paddles to poles to convert them into oars and had fastened stakes along the forward gunwale for thole pins. The River Cat noticed Blair examining the arrangement, and made an illuminating explanation.

"The only good thing that the trader *blancos* have brought to the rivers is that oars for a big boat are better than paddles. Give the word, padrão, and we start."

During the next few days illumination was shed, too, upon a former cryptic remark about security from wild beasts in flood country. The white men sat with rifles ready to hand—the River Cat with much uncouth inward chuckling had unearthed Big Jim's from beneath the *pirarucu* bale and cleaned it from the foul oily exudation—ready to snap up and shoot the first denizen of the jungle upon which they might chance, and so to vary the horrible monotony of their diet. The River Cat, perched on the palm thatch cabin roof at the stern, watched the swirls and eddies and cross currents with the instinct of a fish, and with a long steering paddle guided the boat sometimes so close to the dense wall of greenery that the overhanging branches swished by his face. Shooting would have been easy if there had been anything to shoot at. When he understood the white men's eagerness, his round eyes opened in wonder at their ignorance.

"But consider, padrão. Here we travel in comfort without stinging insects. How, then, may animals be here?"

This was jungle logic that was beyond Blair's perception. He wondered what frightful blight haunted that tropic paradise for crawling things and killed off even pests that made human life miserable. But his natural guess was as far from the mark as is most guesswork about the jungle. This was a matter of cause and effect. The dwarf explained.

"How shall there be animals here when this country for six months of every rainy season is covered with water as deep as three men or four, no man knows how far back. Only the fish-eating *jacaré* lives here. For the same reason no insects that suck blood are here. When we come to mosquitoes and *piume* flies, then will be the time to look for meat."

A shrewd observation on woodcraft that

was novel to one who had come with the idea that all of the dense Amazon jungle teemed with wild life. Novel but true. The river wound between a wall of trees on either side; unbroken miles of solid verdure, dense and matted with *lianas* and parisitic growths, cover enough for all the wild life of the earth. Yet the awesome silence of the inner gloom was only accentuated by the glare of the hot sun on the river. Not a live creature was seen till long after they had passed the last of the traders' *sitios;* and then one day the River Cat put his fingers to his lips and rendered a perfect imitation of the mournful call of the black spider monkey. Immediately the hoarse bark of a challenging male answered from the forest.

"Ha," chuckled the River Cat. "There is meat, *padrão.* The *marimono* is the best of them all. I will send two machete men to cut a path."

But the white men were not such hardened explorers yet that they could relish the thought of monkey meat. That was to come later.

Not so the Indians. It was a rule of those starved rivers that the procurement of food took precedence over other activity. The thought of permission never entering his head, the River Cat swung the boat inshore. The rowers snatched their weapons and leaped, silent-footed, to the outstanding roots and low limbs of the tree fringe and like ghosts melted into the dimness. Came a period of silence, then hoarse challenges from the ground level, angry replies from above, an almost human shriek and a commotion among the tree tops. Another silence, and then the same thing repeated farther away. Those men, as are all savages, were pot hunters pure and simple, insatiable as long as meat remained in sight. In about an hour they came back, trooping through the dimly lighted forest like ogres after raid, carrying five gruesomely human corpses thrown over their shoulders.

And the same token was the signal for the advent of mosquitoes. Famished great brutes as big as gnats and with proportionate virulence to their sting, though happily not of the genus *anopheles*, the malaria carrier. The naked Indians bore with them stoically, as being but one of the lesser trials of life in the jungle. The River Cat was even able to regard them as something of a blessing.

"No traders' *sitios* above this place, padrão," he laughed.

But the white men's patience was exhausted within the same day, and they crouched under the shelter of the palm thatch roof and swore viciously at the insects and the heat and each other till a queer twist of irony brought about that Big Bill, of all unexpected people, resigned himself to the evil with an approach to philosophy. He was the one whose uncontrolled appetite had suffered most from the monotony of fare, and he culminated his steady cursing of hours with a final grandiose oath and growled:

"Well, by gawsh! If skeeters means meat 'at we kin git our teeth into, I takes back a good day's cussin' over 'em."

Yet many weary days passed before meat other than tree dwellers was met with. First had to come higher ground with better drainage to rise above the level of that terrible flood country. Higher ground meant rapid water. The place, Cigano, which the consul had mentioned and which turned out to be a group of seven rubber gatherers' huts, was passed, and the *batelão* had turned due south into a swift flowing stream, which the River Cat called the Taroacá, before the first fast water had to be negotiated.

THIS was no brawling rivulet dotted with rocks and white-crested riffles, but a mile's width of deep water that glided down in long, smooth undulations and lifted in great oily domes over unseen obstructions below the surface. Awe-inspiring in the silence of its volume.

"This is no *caxoeira,*" said the River Cat. "This is easy water."

And for a rapid it was easy. An Indian tied an end of the stout *piassaba* fiber cable round his middle and crawled with it from tree to rock and on to twisted root along the bank to the cable's limit. There he made fast, and the rest of the crew hauled up on the rope while the *capitão*, with expert paddle, kept the boat just clear of the shore. There were places round the angles of jutting boulders where the fierce current sucked so hungrily at the boat that the crew, with straining muscles, were held at a standstill. The *capitão* then, like a true skipper, yelled to his owners to pitch in and give a hand. Blair jumped to snatch up the loose end of the rope and Big Jim followed. Their

combined weight almost jerked the boat out of the water's grip before crafty Pete could bestir himself.

"*Amm-mul*" muttered the River Cat. "That big gringo knows nothing at all, but he can pull on a rope like a speared *pira-rucu*."

That ascent lifted them out of flood country, and that evening the River Cat nosed the boat into a soft sand patch formed by an eddy behind an outcrop. On long arms and crooked legs he humped himself ape-wise over the sand and presently pointed at a splayed-out clover leaf track as wide as the palm of his hand.

"Meat," he grunted. "Here it drinks. This must be its path from the lie-up. If that gringo who must have meat can sit by the path for one half hour at the sunset it will surely come."

A half hour's vigil beside a jungle path did not seem to be any particularly difficult feat, and both Blair and Big Jim took their rifles and followed the well marked run for some fifty yards into the underbrush and made themselves comfortable for a wait which they knew would have to be as nearly motionless as possible.

Within five minutes they knew that it was not at all possible. All the stinging insects of the earth came out of their lairs with the first hush of dusk and accepted joyfully the tender meal provided for them by the gods who stir in men's breasts the lust of the chase. Jim, like many big strong men, could be driven to distraction by petty afflictions which a much weaker person, a woman for instance, could bear with fortitude. For ten minutes he bore it, though shuffling and slapping in a manner that would have scared off the most ferocious beast within hearing. Then he cursed all meat and doubly cursed all crawling things and thrice cursed himself if he would stay another minute. Rather would he live upon cold boiled fish for the rest of his days.

Blair remained alone. He was, of course, as badly stung and nipped as the other. But hard experience was teaching him the rudiments of psychology. He was convinced of the need, hardly acknowledged boss as he was, of holding that ascendency over an unruly follower by the continual demonstration of ability to do something that the other could not do. He gritted his teeth therefore and sat on with tingling hands and a burning face and a determination that was almost a prayer that he might be able to hold out.

And the gods of the chase, who always reward mortals who will pass their stern tests, rewarded him sooner than he had dared to hope. The soft light of the lower jungle was toning everything to a universal gray and Blair was experiencing that inevitable crawling of the spine that assails even a hardened jungle man at dusk, wondering whether some soft-footed killer may not be stalking from behind, when all of a sudden, with the astonishing silence of jungle creatures, a large brown beast with an extraordinarily square snout stood in the path before him and looked with instinctive suspicion almost into the muzzle of his rifle. Blair, keyed up as he was, was startled into firing without coming to shoulder. He ought to have missed, of course. But the nearness of the beast was his fortune. It plunged forward and lay still. Blair had never seen one before, but even in the dusk that extraordinary mallet head could not be mistaken. He knew it for a capybara. Sixty pounds of tough, red stringy sinew and gristle. But meat. Something that the teeth could take hold of and chew upon. Something other than fish.

Big Jim was almost the hearty, jovial Jim of the old days when Blair dumped it off his shoulder by the little fire that already awaited it on the sand patch.

Pete, during these days of toil and stress, had been quiet enough and unobtrusive enough to be almost a good traveling companion. The need of self-preservation had thrown back groping fingers into the misty realm of heredity and was bringing out tenacious traits that had persisted through a generation or so of assimilation in the melting pot. The heat did not worry him. While the other two sweated in inaction and longed to strip down to the buff in order to absorb what coolness they could by evaporation from their bare skins, yet dared not expose any larger surface than necessary to the insects, he sat or lolled on a box or a bale in comfort. When the other two swore in futile frenzy at the accompanying host of buzzing, crawling, stinging things, he bore the irritation with an oriental patience. Food was an infinitesimal item in life which didn't matter as long as it contained nutriment, and his sparse frame needed little of that. While the others growled in ill temper, he remained, suave and polite.

Sterling qualities, these; of inestimable value to a traveler of the far, waste spaces. Qualities which would have made an all-conquering pioneer explorer if backed by certain other even more necessary ones. Pete had not assimilated sufficiently to have absorbed the sterner qualities of personal courage, of direct thought and action, of physical energy.

When the others growled and argued, Pete remained discretely silent. When the thousand little emergencies of travel arose, his mind responded least quickly. When there was need for exertion, while the heat lassitude of the equatorial belt did not affect him, it was never Pete who jumped to haul on a rope or to fend off a floating tree trunk. In his philosophy of life all such things were well enough for lesser minds; for brawn, not for brains. He kept much to himself, aloof and preoccupied. Pete was thinking.

Except that he shirked shamelessly, his conduct, as the laborious days went by, was all that was to be desired. The diametric opposite of Big Jim's. While Pete's response was always "Yes, Mr. Blair; sure, Mr. Blair," with Jim, Blair had a difference of opinion or a wordy quarrel over every contingency that arose. Yet Blair, watching the two of them, herding them along with all his craft of leadership, craft that was coming to him with every fresh day's experience now, reverted to his earlier muttered comment.

"Wonder what's going on in his slick skull. I'll have to watch him."

In comparison, Big Jim was a simple problem in animal psychology. Blair was beginning to understand how to handle him. When they came to a turbulent run of rapid water which even the River Cat admitted to be a *caxoeira*, bad water, where it was necessary to drag the *batelão* bodily through a racing current and over slippery rocks by sheer pulley haul and wrestle of sweating muscle; when the big fellow lay back and voiced his scornful opinion of the Indians' struggling efforts and shouted directions to them in his own brand of Portuguese which nobody could understand, Blair egged him on.

"Well, why in blazes don't you show them, if you're so good?"

"Betcha hat I could show 'em how to snake her out o' this," growled Jim. "I bossed a nigger road gang once, pardner. But I didn't pitch in an' heave with 'em. What's yer gorilla *capitão* good for?"

"Huh! Easy talking!" was Blair's taunt. "But I guess those lads would show you up in this job. They're used to this kind of work."

And with that he left him. He eased his body over the side of the boat into the swirling water and shoved or hauled with the Indians wherever he thought it would do the most good. This was diplomacy as taught by observation in the school of experience. The kind of diplomacy that wins. In less than a minute Jim's voice was shouting with testy authority:

"——, we'll never get outa here this way. Hey, nigger, take ahold here. You too. Now then!"

And there he was up to his armpits against the side of the boat, heaving with the strength of three.

Decidedly, Blair was learning the leadership that stimulates rather than drives; and with it he was learning that the leadership of an expedition was a labor fraught with weariness and endless responsibility and, more difficult for him, control of his own temper in order that his wits might be alert to make the best of a situation; and finally, most difficult of all, the indomitable will to endure and perservere, guts enough to stick with that kind of travel.

PLENTIFULLY right had the consul been when he had said that nobody knew what up-river travel was like until he had tried it. All the difficulties of the worst journeying piled together here. Blistering heat, hard labor, constant water-soaking, half drying, soggy food and, over and above all, all the time, without ceasing, the scourge of noxious insects, the frenzied exasperation of which drove strong men to screaming fits of impotent blasphemy.

The nightly pest of mosquitoes was to be expected, of course. But precautions could be taken against mosquitoes, even though they were more poisonously voracious than all others of their kind in the known world. It was the daily harassment of *piume* flies that inflamed tempers to a pitch of savagery that bordered on the perpetual edge of fight. Tiny creatures they were, of a tremendous thirst, that settled without warning, buzz or sting and, having feasted, left a purple-brown blood blister that itched, each one

individually, for days. And so active were they in the heat of the sun, when the need of travel rendered it impossible to cower under a net or behind a smudge, that the concurrent blisters over every exposed millimeter of face and hands gave the white men at a short distance the appearance of Indians.

It was small compensation that they were now in a splendid game country and that meat could be killed almost at any turn of the river without stepping off the *batelão*. Bush turkeys drummed among the tree-tops and stretched inquisitive necks from the shelter of the leaves to peer at the unaccustomed invaders. Curassow, white-meat birds as tender as chicken, flapped from one side to the other, offering splendid shots. On the clay banks gorgeous macaws strutted clumsily, apparently eating the stuff, and bunched so thick that a single shot would slaughter a dozen. Tapirs bathed in the eddies at sundown. Agoutis and paca, Lucullian delicacies, scratched about their jungle business at the water's edge. Peccaries drank in herds.

Meat in profligate abundance for the taking. But the eternal irony of the jungle manifested itself again in that meat, when it is plentiful, loses its savor. It was Big Jim of course who voiced the discontent.

"Burn my brand if I don't take back all I said about me for the bugs if they means meat. Cripes, what a —— blasted country! Lost is what's the matter with us. Lost in the middle o' burnin' nowhere. Even the gorilla don't know where we are nor where we're goin'. I open's a vote for quittin' this fool trail an' goin' back."

It was true. Even the River Cat did not know this water. There were tributary streams, any one of which might have led to the Jatuarana. He chose the one he chose only by instinct.

"What matter what country we are in?" he maintained. "Maybe we are over the border of the country that the *blancos* call Bolivia. But who knows in these upper rivers where are borders. This is good water. Where there is meat there will presently be men, and of them we can inquire the road to the witchcraft. If we are wrong we can turn and go back. What matter? Water is water."

His instinct, like that of a fish, was unerring. Two days later they rounded a bend and came upon a dugout canoe in the bow of which a bronze statue poised with a spear uplifted, peering into the depths of a pool. A slimmer figure, a boy, who held the canoe motionless with a broad-bladed painted paddle, gave a shrill cry of alarm. Immediately the fisherman snatched his paddle and together the two drove their craft upstream in a frenzy of speed.

The River Cat stood up on the thatched cabin roof and shouted after them in the Geral dialect, scraps of which Blair was able to make out to be a eulogy of himself to the effect that he was no trader but a munificent white chief whose aim in life was to give astounding bargains to poor Indians. The man looked back over his shoulder, but continued to ply his paddle as if the evil one had appeared round the bend. The River Cat shouted again.

"It is I, Ohkohthithero of the rivers who take service with no trader *blanco*. Await me and take my message to your chief. The senhor padrão will pay a whole handful of salt."

Perhaps the man had heard something of that name. Perhaps the magnitude of the remuneration tempted him to take a chance. At all events he ceased paddling and let the canoe drift till the *batelão* came up with him.

"Where is your village?" the River Cat asked him.

The man pointed mutely with his chin to where at the next far bend of the river a little creek cut a swath through the solid bank of verdure.

"Good. Go swiftly and announce that white men come. And, here. My padrão pays in advance. Here is salt for a year's eating."

The man stared dumbly at the proffered wealth and then cast about him in confusion for something to put it in. What receptacle could a naked Indian in a dugout canoe have for salt? Finally he bade the boy take it in his cupped hands, and so holding it, like an egg and spoon race, he dipped his paddle with careful strokes.

The village, a big one of five *molocas*, or community houses, was hidden half a mile up the creek. At the narrow places trees, hewn through at the base, poised above, held by ropes of twisted *lianas*, crude portcullises which could be dropped at the slash of a machete as a defense against the passage of a *batelão*. At the village landing naked men stood about, solemnly noncommittal, as if they just happened to be there.

The appearance of things was as of a village going about its business peacefully enough. But it was not what the River Cat had hoped for. The little beach should have been deserted except for two armed men holding between them the feathered community spear and behind them a formal committee of sub-chiefs to extend an invitation to the strangers to come up to the council *moloca* and go through the ceremony of breaking mandioca bread and dipping in the *manisawa* sauce. The River Cat climbed slowly from his perch on the cabin roof.

"Here also have traders been some time," he said. "But these men make no war with us. Senhor padrão and the gringos may at least land."

Blair stepped ashore, feeling very bewildered. It was his first contact with a purely Indian community, and he was eager to go among them, to observe, to learn and, above all, to ask questions and glean information. But there was just enough suggestion of incipient hostility among these studiously careless loungers to give him pause. Here, however, clever Pete shone. His hereditary thirst for trade overshadowed all hesitation over possible hostilities. He hopped ashore and bustled off up the slope to ferret out whatsoever he might, and it was he who unearthed and tried to hide what the others would never have found.

Blair stayed to suggest a warning to the main trouble element of his party.

"Jim, this looks to me like a good place to watch your step in. So don't go holding up a piece of cloth to any women."

Jim only growled—

"I ain't hankerin' for no truck with them flat faces, nor I ain't thankin' yuh for no advice, neether."

Blair felt that he could safely leave him, and so wandered up to the village after Pete to see what he might see. Which was nothing. Five great barns of split palm trunks and *paxiuba* thatch fronted a clearing. A few plantain trees grew at drunken angles, a few men stood at the single door of each *moloca*, ostentatiously unarmed; a few dogs and chickens scratched in the dirt. That was all. Blair wandered for fifteen minutes as much a stranger as in the middle of Broadway, and then the futility of it overcame him and he turned to go back to his boat. At the edge of the clearing a man suddenly stood by his side. He carried two magnificent pineapples.

"Kariwa trade?" he asked in the simple construction of the Geral.

"No trader, I. I buy." Blair answered.

The man emitted a grunting noise and followed him down to the *batelão*. Here Blair was at a loss. He had no idea how much two pineapples were worth, and the River Cat, as well as the whole crew, had disappeared.

"What give?" asked the man.

"What want?" asked Blair.

The man sniffed, head high, like a hound. "*Pirarucu*," he said.

It staggered Blair that any man should ask for that stuff that tasted as strong as it smelt. But he realized at once that it was the salt content that the man craved. He drew his knife from belt and handed it to the man, pointing to the well in the forward part of the *batelão* between the slatted deck upon which the rowers sat. The man scrambled in and carved himself off a slab about ten inches square.

"So much?" he asked, holding it up.

"Good," said Blair.

Further speech was unnecessary. The man scrambled out with his delicacy, returned the knife and went up the slope to the *molocas*. This was business reduced to its most primitive form, both parties honest and both satisfied. It led to more business. A man came down with a bunch of plantains and a woman with some cassaba cakes. But that was all. What else did these savages possess that white men might want to buy?

NOT so with clever Pete. His inherited nose for trade found a business contact soon enough. Trade was his meat, he had boasted once to his partners, and if a trader could do any business with naked savages, he would go over the same ground and skin them twice. Pete came and rummaged among the goods and strolled off again toward the village. He came back, followed by no man carrying goods in exchange, and sat down in the boat with studied unconcern. Blair was amused at his apparent failure to do business.

"What in thunder did you think you were going to get out of the poor ——?" he asked.

Pete's smile flashed out. He didn't mind being laughed at.

"Oh, nothing. I thought perhaps I might, but—"

He shrugged whimsically to complete the sentence. But Big Jim knew his partner better.

"What yuh got in yer hand?" he demanded.

"Nothing," Pete started to say again.

But Jim heaved himself up with a sudden movement and closed his great paw over the other's tightly clutched fist. Then, like an inexorable starfish opening an unwilling oyster, he thrust Pete's wriggling body between his legs and pried the desperate fingers apart one by one. His rage, as he got sight of their contents, was that of a man strong in virtue confronted with base treachery.

"Why, —— blast yuh, yuh lousy polecat!" he roared. And then dropping him like a discarded sack and turning to Blair, "Lookat here, pardner. Lookit what that —— Syriac was tryin' tuh hold out on us!"

In his great palm lay two little quills of a water bird, stopped with clay at the open end, and they contained what looked like little grains of a rough yellow sand.

Blair's pulse pounded suddenly in his head and his breath came as if he had been running.

It was true then, that rumor about gold from somewhere up in these lost headwaters! He whooped once with the wave of exhilaration that swept over him. The long journey with all its hardships had not been a wild goose chase! The object, at least, of his desperate gamble with fate existed. Gold in quills! If only there might be more of it and if they could get hold of it.

"Where did you get it?" He fired a foolish question at Pete.

But Pete remained sulky. His eyes flickered just once and he scowled and remained silent. Big Jim's great paw reached across and closed over his thin wrist. He gave it a slow half turn.

"Cough it up, crook," he threatened. "Where d'ja get it?"

Pete was no martyr to stand personal pain. He squeaked like a rodent and confessed.

"Ooh, ow! Let go. I got it from a man."

Of course it was obvious. The eager demand had been foolish. Blair's wits came back to him.

"Let the trade rat go, Jim. What's it matter where he got it. The question is, from what man and whether he or anybody else has any more."

But Pete had confessed all he knew. It was a naked man, that was all. He didn't think he could recognize him again, and he did think that that was all the man had, otherwise he would have traded it in.

"We'll have to get hold of the chief or some one and make him some sort of a present and find out whether the tribe has gold to sell," was Blair's decision.

It was the sensible and only thing to do. There followed then a hopeless afternoon of trying to approach people who did not want to be approached, of talking with men who knew nothing and did not want to talk, of inquiring about a chief who held himself as aloof as a society matron. Blair had difficulty in restraining Big Jim's hot impulse to catch the next nearest person and apply the same arm twisting method of extracting information.

"We must find the River Cat and see if he can't make a contact," he determined.

But that seemed to be as hopeless a quest as the other. The River Cat was not anywhere in the village. Blair refused to accept Jim's growling accusation that the gorilla had deserted them.

"He's a queer bird. He'll show up in his own good time," he insisted.

And so he did. With sunset he appeared, accompanied by an ancient, bent nearly as short as himself. He assisted the old man on to the little forward deck of the *batelão* and squatted, elfishly pleased to show that he knew all about the afternoon's events.

"The chiefs of these people are but the talking heads," he announced. "This is the chief, *ipagé*, who walks only after the sun has gone. He will accept a present. He wants an iron spoon and a small piece of red cloth with flowers on it, and afterward, if padrão is satisfied, just a little piece of *pira* for good will."

Blair understood that the first named presents were strictly payment for service rendered, for information, and that the last was to be a tip.

"Good. Give him the spoon and the cloth and the *pira*. I am already pleased."

The old man gathered in his treasures with the avidity of a monkey who has never been sure that he will get the banana. Then he spat a wad of *ipadu* leaf from his cheek

and settled back. He was ready for conversation.

Gold, of course, was the only subject that the white men wanted to talk about.

But the old wizard shook his head. One or two other young men of the village might have a quill or so of gold. He did not know. No gold was found in this vicinity, but a little came in trade from higher up. Not much, because what would the young men do with gold? Except perhaps hold it till some trader came, and they never paid a fair price anyway. For a quill of gold was worth at least a knife, but the traders—

The old man drivelled on in a querulous treble. Blair did a swift calculation. Those little quills held perhaps an ounce of the rough grains apiece. Even considering the cost of transportation, time and risk and the sweat of one's brow, such a quill was worth at least a ten cent store kitchen knife, gold being at some sixteen dollars an ounce in Manaos City. The train of thought led him to inquire quickly what Pete had paid. Pete demurred about giving a straightforward reply. But the River Cat was shrewd enough to guess the purport of the cross-fire of questions.

"He made a haggle with the man," he said accusingly. "And he paid him a knife and five fish-hooks for the two. That is what trader *blancos* do, and I told these people that we were no trader men."

"Hm! Astute little Pete!" commented Blair. "Good. Pay the man another knife and let him keep the fish-hooks for good will. Ask the father of wisdom from where do these quills come then."

The answer, delivered simply as a matter of existing fact, brought a forcible reminder to Blair of what he had passed over with amusement.

"The men from beyond the great witchcraft bring it down and exchange it for iron which our young men get in exchange for the feathers of the *garça* from the men of—"

Blair would have been interested at another time in the tortuous ramifications of intertribal trade. But just now he interrupted the old man's garrulity with a question that was tinged with anxiety.

"What is this witchcraft, *Ipagé*? Tell me more of it."

The wizard spread out his hands.

"I do not know that witchcraft. It is a very great witchcraft that prevents enemies from passing. If I knew, I would tell, and Kariwa would make me a present of a machete."

And that was the sum total of the information that they could get out of him. Blair felt that the naïve old man was telling the truth.

"Brother," he said to him, affecting a lightness which he did not quite feel, "you do the fire witchcraft of the dung and the entrails on my behalf, and when I came back from that great witchcraft I will give you a machete."

The ancient withdrew his shrunken neck into the bone-ridged hollow between his shoulders and with the effort, closed his lids of fine-grained leather over his eyes, just like a tortoise. For a half minute he remained in retreat and then, like a slow-waking tortoise, emerged, blinking wonderingly. Then pointedly he said:

"Good. You will return. I will take a machete with a wire handle."

He gathered up his presents and crept away. Blair looked at his partners questioningly. Pete sloughed off his disgrace as a snake leaves its skin.

"You can count on me, Mr. Blair. Show me gold and I'm with you, even if you are fool enough to pay more than its worth."

Jim was still in the dark.

"What did the old buzzard say? I couldn't get the hang o' half of it."

Blair told him. Jim cleared his throat and spat. There was nothing that he could see to be backward about.

"Shucks! All I says is, show me thet hokum. If them quills comes f'm further up, they ain't no snake dance nor no hoo-hoo spooks gonna keep me out."

Which was what Blair thought himself. Yet it seemed to him that it behooved a wise leader to approach with circumspection a barrage of magic which apparently was more than a mere imagination and which, trick of some sort though it must be, had been strong enough to repulse another white man, that Mac person whom the consul spoke of. He made an opportunity to speak to the River Cat about it, to ask whether he had picked up any information in his prowlings. The dwarf attempted in grotesque imitation of the wizard's gesture to shrink his head between his burly shoulders.

"These men knew nothing, padrão, except that it is a witchcraft of a white mist

which descends upon traders. What matter? Where there is water, you and I can go. Furthermore, what has that witchcraft to do with us? For—" he lowered his voice confidentially— "the wizard said that you would come back. For those two gringos or their happenings, what do we care?"

Blair had not thought to arrogate to himself the ancient soothsayer's pointed prophesy. He laughed at the dwarf's solemn acceptance of the thing as a promise of immunity and at his cheerful callousness about the fate of the other two.

"What of the crew?" he asked him. "Will they face this witchcraft or will they jump and swim for it and leave us perhaps in midstream, three men and the crafty one, to handle a heavy boat?"

The dwarf swelled up like a toad in the dark.

"The crew will do exactly as I tell them, padrão."

Blair felt that the crew would face that witchcraft as long as any man of the party; and forthwith he gave his orders with an easy mind.

"Very well. Tell them to be ready for a start with sunrise tomorrow. Get all the directions for the right road, and we will go and have a look at this witchcraft.

GOLD! The stuff that has been decried by moralists ever since it was first cursed with the name of filthy lucre! Just two little quills of it! Yet what a psychological medicament for the curing of jangled nerves and the smoothing over of ragged tempers and the bolstering up of tottering morale!

The strenuous days that followed were twice as hard as all the preceding. The rapids were more frequent and faster and fuller of rocks. The insects could not be worse, but they remained just as bad. Yet Big Jim, with the golden prospect before him, was the hearty Big Jim of the old days. Pete emerged from his aloof introspection and set to compiling comparative lists of goods on the basis of kitchen knives as the unit of exchange for quills of gold, sort of multiplication tables reading, "A knife into a mirror goes twice; a knife into a spoon, three times; a knife into a machete, twenty-four times." Blair, watching him, could not resist throwing in the monkey-wrench to upset his fine calculations.

"You're overlooking a business bet, *amigo*. Consider. If a knife down there was considered a fair price for a quill, the same knife so much farther away from the source of production will be worth more, while a quill of gold, so much nearer to the source of production, will be worth less."

Pete almost snarled at him. That is to say, his flashing smile was sour, which was as close to snarling as Pete ever permitted himself to come.

"There isn't one last little item in this deal that I've overlooked, Mr. Blair. I'm figuring a knife because of your pig-headed attitude toward trade with these savages."

Pig-headed! There was the old accusation thrown up at him again. But Blair somehow experienced none of the old resentment against the word. If according to results he would be judged, he felt that he had followed his own opinionativeness and stuck with what he had started till he was at last very close to results. He laughed.

"Let it stand at a knife, brother. I guess we can afford to buy gold at that price."

Three days later they swung into the fabled Jatuarana, a foothill river which ran in steps. That is to say, in long levels of sluggish water between short and steep rapids. Some of them so steep and rock-filled that the *batelão* had to be unloaded of all its gear and dragged now and then over dry land. Blair understood now what the River Cat had meant when he said that a plank-bottomed boat would have opened out like the fingers of a hand under this treatment.

But the solid dugout tree trunk survived eleven such rapids as only experienced up-river men, or men who bought their experience as they went along, would think of passing in a boat. And then the River Cat announced—

"Between the eleventh and the twelfth, they said, on the left hand side was the *igarapê* of the witchcraft."

And there was awe in his tone, for he believed very implicitly in witchcraft.

Almost immediately there opened out the entrance to a haunt of trolls and jungle goblins. Or say rather, of nymphs of the inner forest, for the entrance was darkly beautiful. In the middle of a long, smooth, silent water the tree wall suddenly gaped in a tall gothic arch, fronted with the fluted columns of towering scented *cedrellas* and roofed with the groined tracery of their interlaced

branches. The face of the arch, where the sun struck it, was hung with holiday festoons of flowering *lianas* and six-foot trailers of orchids, yellow as butter, that swayed and nodded as orchids do in the stillest air, and filled the atmosphere with an overpowering scent of bananas.

Beyond that gay entrance a vaulted cloister stretched away still and silent into dim green distances that never saw the sun and were steamy with moisture that never dried.

"Port your helm and bend to it!" Blair shouted.

And much though he tried to disguise it under cover of boisterous exhilaration, there was awe in his tone, though he believed in witchcraft not at all.

The dwarf leaned hard against his steering paddle; the crew responded to his croak of command with a will. The *batelão* heeled as it swung in a sharp curve and shot between the garlanded pillars, for all the world as if entering the welcome arch of a water carnival. And then everybody gasped.

A bank of hot air, many degrees warmer than outside, enveloped them. The stillness was eerie. From far above sounds came to them, the shrieks of parrots and the high-pitched cough of toucans that frolicked somewhere up there in the sun above the canopy of entangled limbs and vines.

Warm drops fell upon them from the matted roots of parasitic growths. Long ghostly feelers with pale and sensitive tips reached down to tap the surface of the water and perhaps to find lodgment and root, so that the tunnel looked as if it were hung with countless pale pink and white ropes of a thousand lengths and sizes. Below, the water was clear and rusty brown with the exudations from submerged root bark. A very canal tunnel they had plunged into, old and disused and overgrown.

Insensibly the rowers' pace slackened. The boisterous voices of the white men descended the tonal gamut till they talked in suppressed murmurs befitting the scene. Eyes grew big with uneasiness and heads turned over shoulders looking for they didn't know what. Only the dwarf, crouched ghoulishly at the extreme end of the cabin thatch, harmonized with the spooky surroundings, and appeared at his ease. Blair addressed him, and his voice was a whisper.

"Where in this beastly *igarapé* is this witchcraft thing supposed to happen?"

The dwarf shrugged his great shoulders and made the fan motion with his hands. That was all. Big Jim, whose imagination could not rise to anything so elusive as magic, rolled out an oath and made a long reach into the cabin shelter behind him, emerging with two rifles and a cartridge bag gripped in one enormous paw.

"Aw, what the——!" he growled. "What 'r we actin' up like a bunch o' yearlings? I'll bet a hundred-an'-ten-grain hunk o' lead, four o' five caliber's as good white man's witchcraft against any highgaloozum that any nigger Injun can turn loose. Let 'er go, pardner. What'r we layin' up for?"

With that practical reminder of material things Blair was able to shake off the oppression of that gloomy canal and to laugh at himself. He gave the orders to proceed, though slowly and keeping a sharp lookout against a trap.

BUT THERE was no trap. The creek wound, silent and empty, into the inner jungle, widening a little now and then, narrowing again, but always between its encompassing wall of tree and cane and vine. For some hours they progressed. Nobody knew how many; time seemed to attenuate itself and stretch enormously in that humid warmth. At last away ahead of them they saw the cheerfully incredible—an actual patch of sunlight on the still water. Some giant of the forest had completed the span of its three or four hundred years and had fallen, tearing away with it the tangle of aeroids that had sapped its strength and leaving a hole in the roof. Its great buttressed root end reared itself like a clay-daubed cliff over the water. After so many hours of gloomy shade the voyagers approached the open stretch of sunlight with a grateful feeling of good cheer.

And then suddenly a patch of color in the full sunlight that struck the root top resolved itself into a man.

"Wah!" the dwarf croaked, and the rowers froze in their stroke.

The white men tensed and gripped their rifles, expecting anything at all. The *batelão* drifted with its own momentum till it grounded softly, almost as if willfully, on some under-water rootlet directly below the sentinel.

The root buttress formed a natural platform on which the man stood as motionless as a painted heron or a kingfisher poised over a pool and waiting for its prey. He was a tall fellow in middle age, well muscled and of a haughty truculence of manner that was not without a certain savage dignity. The color of him that caught the eye was the feather decoration which, with slight local variations, designated a sub-chief among all the up-river tribes.

He wore a band or chaplet of red and orange toucan feathers round his forehead, from which projected straight into the air two tenuous horns of crimson macaw tail. At elbows and knees were circlets of soft brown monkey fur trimmed with orange and black plumes. Round his waist a belt of peccary teeth supported his bark cloth gee string and an old and much worn machete. Straight in front of him, hanging loosely with one end projecting over the platform edge and pointing directly down into the boat, the man held a ten-foot-long, business-like tube, the upper end very close to his lips. He stood so and looked down at the boat with the cold hostility of one who feels himself to be very comfortably in command of the situation. Then he said with an air of finality.

"Greeting, *Kariwa*, and good-by. This is the place of the line beyond which no traders may go."

Blair felt his own vocabulary inadequate to argue with this man over the fine distinction which the River Cat had set up for him and which his own mind had accepted, about the difference between a trader and one who wanted to buy gold for a certain price, even though he paid in trade goods. He motioned to the dwarf, who was nothing loth to talk at any time. Humped over his steering paddle like a swollen toad, he croaked up at the man:

"Good-by, little chief. We go on to visit the big chief of your people."

The man was too conscious of his dignity to wrangle. He only scowled down and repeated what was obviously a formula.

"This is the place beyond which no trader *batelão* may go."

The dwarf felt himself to be stigmatized by the trader taint.

"We are no traders," he said shortly. "Therefore we will wait here till you send a message to the chiefs in council with our present to say that we await invitation to make the ceremony of eating bread in the council *moloca*."

The man stuck doggedly to his formula.

"This is the place beyond which no trader may go." And added an explanation. "Our people have no chiefs in council. It is the order of our Wise One."

Big Jim burst impatiently in upon the *impasse*.

"What all is them two nigger men holdin' a convention about?"

"Oh, shucks!" Blair explained. "This fellow is a sort of a dumb traffic cop who understands nothing but this one and only order—no thoroughfare. We've just got to ride over him and get to the big chief and explain it to him that we're not looking for trouble or women or any flim-flam, but we want to make a fair and square deal for gold at so much per quill. I take it that those people aren't fools, and they'll soon see that we're not the trader kind on whom they've such a hate." To the man he said, "We have a present for your big chief. If you will not send it, we must carry it in our own hands."

The man remained unperturbed. Not for him was it to weigh and to decide. He was the perfect sentry.

"I am not here to fight," he said, indicating his feather ornaments which were a token of the formal nature of his office. "I am here only to warn. Beyond me is the witchcraft of the Wise One. It is enough." He shrugged as if he had said, "It is the impassable gulf." Then he laughed with a sudden evil humor. "It is well. In our *molocas* are fighting men whom the trader *blancos* would not care to meet."

His duty was apparently done. He stepped backward along the great tree root, the last of him to disappear being the end of his long blow-gun which remained pointing menacingly at the boat till its baneful black muzzle drew itself over the edge and was lost to view. Almost immediately, as if the man had disappeared into a hole in the ground, a bush turkey flapped down into the sunlit patch, alighted, spread its wings to strut, saw motion in the boat and, with a startled squawk, whirred off into shelter again.

The unwelcome guests were left looking at one another in the silence that shut down as if resentful of having been aroused from its doze in the steam bath. Experience had taught Blair that a wise leader, if his authority be not backed by all the force of

an organization, such as an office, must not be too didactic; he must at least let his followers think that they have a share in decision. He laid bare his thoughts therefore.

"Well, partners, we've had our warning. So far we've been safe. As I understand it, these up-river Indians will warn off people whom they don't want, and then, if the intruders insist, whatever is coming to them is their own lookout. Now here's my cards on the table. I've got to make a stake out of this thing. Either that or go back to an office job and—well, I just won't do it. I've come so far and I'll be —— and deserve it too if I quit now. Mind you, if that gate keeper had promised a line-up of blow-gun men, I'd maybe have thought twice about it. But since it's magic that we're up against—something deadly enough, I suppose, if it scared that Scotchman off; but some sort of a trick at best—I for one am—"

"Aw, cut out the sermon," Big Jim interrupted him. "Come ahead. There's no Injun kin scare me."

And Pete added his vote with a hint of sarcasm which he could not repress.

"You have no monopoly, Mr. Blair, in wanting to trade ten-cent knives for gold, even if you do call it buying. When we once get into this crowd I see no reason why our superior intelligence should find any difficulty in showing this Wise Guy or whatever it is who bosses them that it will be to his advantage to deal with us on a fair basis."

Blair looked at Pete.

"Too smooth," he said to himself. "Too darn smooth. Wonder what he's got in mind." Then aloud, "Seems we're agreed then. Remains to be seen if the crew will face this witchcraft."

"Leave 'em to me," Jim voiced his aggressive demand. "I've driven crews before now, an', by golly, if I can't handle six naked Injuns, I'll give up my share o' the loot, an' that's somep'n I ain't doin', buddy."

But Blair turned to the River Cat. That one expressed his sublime confidence.

"They will go wherever I tell them, have no fear, padrão. Besides, they know that this is a witchcraft prepared against trader *blancos*, and they know that padrão is no trader. Also, I have told them that the great senhor can easily overcome this witchcraft."

"Hm!" Blair muttered. "Hope to —— you're right. Anyway, since we've been forewarned plenty enough, we don't have to butt into it blind. My vote is that we camp right here below the dead line and tackle this witchcraft thing tomorrow when we can give a whole day to it."

"Second the motion," said Pete.

THE morning mists were still steaming off the creek when the *batelão* got under way. At that open space where the falling tree had torn a path to the upper air the vapors were able to shred out in thin wisps and disappear. But above that, where the matted roof tangle closed in again and there were no dissipating air currents other than the slow down draught of any creek, they could do nothing but rise and float aimlessly for a while and then condense again over the surface of the water. So that it looked as though the boat, like Merlin's enchanted barge, drifted upon a pearly sea of cloud.

The crew pulled stolidly with a slow stroke while the white men lay under the thatched cabin, sheltered from blow-gun darts as much as possible, and watching with ready rifles, for they did not know what. Away to the right a dull drumming sounded in the jungle. *Thump-thump, thump-a-thump, thump-thump-thump.* Blair grimaced.

"I had a kind of a sneaking hope that maybe, if we'd get up early, we might get ahead of that magic. River Cat, can you read that stuff?"

The dwarf shook his great head.

"The reading is known only to the witch-doctors who send. What matter? I know what it says. They signal the witchcraft to be prepared, that we are coming."

"Then it's not right at hand," said Blair. "We can afford to speed up for a little distance anyway."

The creek wound on, apparently without end, still and silent and steamy. The ghostly root feelers that hung from above brushed the faces of the intruders with wet white fingers. The screams of macaws far above passing to their feeding grounds sounded like tortured souls that ranged the skies. A good place here to work a witchcraft. But not yet. The maker of this witchcraft apparently understood something of the psychology of wearing down the nerves before springing his trap.

The creek widened here and there a little, and where it did so the light that filtered from above was as soft as in a photographer's studio. Once it opened out so that the trees no longer met, and the life-giving sun itself broke through. Immediately orchids blazed in their painted festoons. Butterflies flapped lazily like kites cut adrift. Beetles hurtled across the opening with the angry buzz of bullets. A magic glade of teeming tropic life.

Then the canal closed in again and the *batelão* crept up a dimly lighted, sweltering tunnel once more. This was narrower than before and correspondingly gloomier and steamier. The miasmatic vapors floated higher than ever, and where a vagrant down draught stirred them, they rose in wet billows that filled the dim passage to the roof. Ahead of them it looked as if they were about to plunge into a veritable fog bank.

Suddenly the dwarf croaked a warning.

"The mist, padrão! The tale was of a poison mist!"

Blair looked at the smoky white rack uneasily. It seemed to be more than a thickening of the prevailing morning vapors.

"Maybe we'd better turn the boat round," he said.

With some confusion the crew executed the maneuver. They were not used to backing on the one side and pulling on the other, as was necessary in that narrow space. As it was, there was just room for the *batelão* to turn, and that, only by poling off at bow and stern.

They waited so to see what that fog might want to do. Slowly, with the faint downstream current, it drifted toward them. The dwarf, nearest to it at the extreme stern, lifted his head and sniffed. It was nervous work, this waiting for a mystery that might be nothing at all.

And then, all in a second, as if actuated by some cunning and malign force, the witchcraft enveloped them. A billow of vapor rolled out in advance of the rest and blotted the River Cat from view. A moment he was lost to sight, and then he emerged out of it, leaping like a huge frog along the cabin top. After him the billow, loth to lose him. The current that he drew with his flying body brought a suffocating whiff to Blair. It caught at the back of his throat with a strangling grip that held him gasping. Twice he essayed, but succeeded only in gagging and choking before his voice could confirm the frantic command of his hands.

"Pull!" he wheezed at last. "Back to—to the open, like—"

A fit of coughing cut off his speech. But it had been unnecessary. With the arrival of the dwarf sprawling among them, the crew were already pulling with straining muscles as if the *jurupary* of the black jungles had looked out of the fog at them. Then Blair remembered.

The steering oar! It was untended. If the boat's nose once crashed into the tangle of overhanging canes and creepers at either bank, as it surely would, there they would be entrapped while the witchcraft swept down and devoured them at its leisure.

The cabin roof was like the half arc of a narrow funnel, open at the farther narrow end, over which opening a gunny sack was hung. It was a direct dispensation of Providence that it was so, and it was the only chance. Blair dashed back inside the cabin, scrambling and tumbling over the piled cases of goods, skinning his knees and elbows cruelly. But he reached the end and thrust his arm through to grope for the paddle, holding the sack as close as he could with his other hand.

He found it. Wisps of white vapor found their way round the edges of the gunny sack and rasped at the mucous lining of his throat, fighting with him for the possession of his breath. Yet worse than his own torture was the horrid thought that the coughing and choking which he heard out in front might sap the strength from the rowers' muscles. And added to his plight was the desperate need of keeping his eyes open. He could see down the length of the cabin funnel and far ahead the converging perspective of a lane of trees, and by this he steered, hanging on grimly while his head tried to tear itself loose with coughing.

"God helps a discreet man, while the devil catches a fool," is a shrewd proverb of Brazil. Perhaps because Blair had been discreet enough to turn the *batelão* around in time, God helped him to win that desperate race against the strangling vapor. He certainly would never have won it otherwise. The boat, despite the handicap of gasping lungs, made better time than the drifting witchcraft. It drew clear and presently shot out of the cramped tunnel into the sunlight space where fairy flowers bloomed and butterflies chased each other in their brief

span of love-making and witchcraft was a fantastic belief of a far nether world.

Without command the rowers stopped, shrinking from plunging into another tunnel at the farther end and glad of the respite to lean limply over their oars and cough their hearts out. Blair crawled out of the cabin and found his knees cumbered by the clinging arms of the dwarf.

"Padrão, I am shamed!" he moaned. My manhood vomits within me. I would have come back, but that is a strong witchcraft. It held me by the throat and I could not move for choking. Padrão, I am no better than those gringos."

"Cheer up, amigo," Blair choked forth. "There is no shame. You got a mouthful of it."

He was glad to sit with his feet hanging over the side and to hold his own head. The others were in no better case. And so they floated and watched the white fog drift slowly down the tunnel—it was in no hurry now. It billowed quietly out into the open and writhed upward in graceful whorls and spirals and softly dissipated itself in the sunlight.

Jim cleared his throat and spat, cleared again and said hoarsely:

"I know what that stink is. It's raw rubber. There was a rubber shed took fire down at Maranhao an' it stank out the populace for half a mile round."

"Yes, and sulphur too," said Blair. "And something more than that to bite so sudden and sharp. Some jungle gum that their wizard has found. Looks like that Wise One is wise."

"How d'yuh reckon he shoots the hull crick full with it?"

"Hanged if I know—yet. That's up to us to find out."

Pete said nothing. He had been very close to a physical danger, and quick readjustment was not a part of his heritage. For perhaps an hour between intervals of coughing, they watched the innocuous looking mist drift out of the jungle tunnel, and then it thinned out and presently it was gone. And the morning mists of the water surface had dissipated themselves too, and there the creek lay, dim and silent and empty.

The River Cat made his proclamation of sublime faith.

"How does padrão propose to overcome that witchcraft?"

Blair started. He had been immersed in a contemplation of weighty issues. Of one, for instance, that this opposition to their advance was more than a mere gesture of discouragement by a sulky tribe who did not want to have white men come poking into their country. For another, that perhaps it would be a safer and saner policy to leave such a tribe to its own seclusion; that perhaps gold might be less dearly bought somewhere else. But the dwarf's simple faith that harbored no thought of abandonment snapped him back to take up another train of his cogitations. He stiffened, physically as well as mentally, and asked a quite irrelevant question of his own.

"I've noticed no *jacarés* or caimans in this condemned creek. Where can I shoot me a caiman, River Cat?"

"A caiman? Amm-mu! Does padrão know how to make the magic of the caiman bowels? That is a very strong magic, too, if padrão knows."

"No, fool. I want the fat to rub over myself like I saw you do once."

The River Cat grinned pleasedly.

"We go to swim? That is good. But in this brown water are no caimans or *jacarés*. Where do we swim, padrão?"

Blair was constrained to laugh, too, at the dwarf's instant inclusion of himself in any venture in the water, blind though he might be as to its purpose. He wondered whether he would back out when he knew.

"This I am going to do," he explained. "It is necessary to find out how that witchcraft is made. Now it is clear that men watch and when a *batelão* comes into the trap, they loose it. But it seems to me that if a *batelão* waits here as a decoy, a man swimming softly under the overhanging tree fringe will likely escape notice and may so come to the place where the witchcraft is brewed."

"So?" said the dwarf. "Two men can swim as softly then as one man."

Pete was staring at Blair round-eyed. It was an incredible thing that he was going to do. Incredible to Pete's mind for two reasons. For one, it was an unthinkable thing to himself to go off naked and swimming in crawly water to explore heaven only knew what danger, and for another, it was equally unthinkable that a man should leave his boat like that, full of valuable trade goods in the hands of any person, even though a saint in the calendar.

Blair turned to Big Jim.

"Partner Jim. I'm looking to you, if I should holler for help or shoot off my gun, to make this crew face all the —— in that creek and come a-running."

JIM was much too obtuse to sense what was in Blair's mind. But he responded with alacrity to the compliment of the confidence reposed in his ability to drive that crew.

"Don't yuh worry none, pard. I'll drive 'em," he rumbled. And Blair knew that he meant it and would be glad for the opportunity. His own preparations were almost as simple as the River Cat's. He stripped down to the buff, replaced his belt to hold a machete, and gave his Luger pistol to the dwarf to tie into his hair with his blow-gun. Then he had the crew paddle the boat close to the edge of the open pool where watchers would not be able to observe and there slipped quietly over the side.

"One shot will mean that I want you, Jim, and two, that I want you good and plenty bad."

Big Jim nodded, his face heavy with resolve. Pete sat watching him with sidelong speculation. There was drama in that picture. The one man, big, slow-thinking, callous enough and powerful enough to do just what he said and single-minded enough to mean to do it. The other, slender, dark, crafty enough to do just what would be to his own advantage and single-minded enough to do nothing else. Drama and the imminent risk of disaster were there. Blair saw both. But what he was setting out to do was an absolute necessity, and he hoped that some of the things that experience had taught him to do had built a safeguard against that risk. If not, after all these weeks of learning, he would almost deserve disaster, he said to himself. At all events the risk had to be taken if he were not prepared to throw up his hands and go back to civilization and safety. The picture of all that that meant decided him. He let go of his hold on the gunwale and glided easily under the branches that hung over like an awning. The River Cat just as easily glided into the lead.

"Only one danger is in this water, padrão," he said. "No caimans or *jacarés*, but *jararacas*, whose bite is more certain than witchcraft, sleeping with their heads above water. My eyes have seen many *jararacas* before now."

Blair was glad enough to let the water phenomenon lead. This was nasty swimming at best. Out in the middle he might almost have enjoyed it. But here at the edge were constant obstructions. Fallen trees that had to be scrambled over, roots that projected treacherously, eel grass that caught at one's feet. Slimy things all, from which the skin of a white man accustomed to clothes shrank with loathing.

But they progressed without mishap. Progressed beyond the place where the *batelão* had been when the poisonous vapor first struck it. Here under the sheltering branches a faint acrid smell remained. Blair was struck by a thought and called softly to the dwarf.

"This is in my mind, River Cat. We do not know from which side came this witchcraft. Dare you then take one side alone while I follow the other?"

"Where there is water Ohkohthithero dares to go," said the dwarf stoutly.

"Good. Since you carry the gun, I will dive."

He went under as silently as an otter and came up under the bush fringe on the other side through a mass of floating *potamogetum* that clogged his nostrils and all but racked a cough from his excoriated throat. Suddenly he felt dreadfully alone. But in the shadow on the other side he could see the mop head of the dwarf progressing with cool confidence. He called himself a fool and set himself to keeping pace with the other as nearly silently as he could, feeling suddenly confident himself that he could, if danger threatened, dive again like an otter to security. With confidence came room for the tingling thrill of the adventure of discovering he did not know what wild and fearsome thing.

But adventure lies in the unexpected. This discovery, like all unexpected thrills, was so tame that he almost missed it. It was that strongly acrid smell again that caused him to stiffen in his stroke and then slowly, very cautiously, to investigate. A fallen tree slanted from the bank close to the water's surface. A stout palm. He was almost pushing under it when the smell held him. The end of the palm which projected over the water was too smooth even to be a natural break. It was hollow, and around its edges the excoriating smell clung

strongly. Blair summoned the dwarf across. The latter inspected the thing wonderingly.

"A *chunto* palm, its pith rotted out," he murmured.

Blair lifted himself softly out of the water, careful to avoid a splash, and crawled on his belly into the under-brush. He found a track almost like that of an animal running alongside the fallen trunk. Some sixty feet tall had been that palm. At its end another palm trunk abutted it in line, the joint cemented together and hidden under a little mound of hard clay.

"A pipe-line, by golly!" Blair muttered. "A ten-inch sewer! Wise old wizard! Now where's the power house?"

He continued to crawl with infinite caution along the track. One trunk length joined another, each carefully cemented in place. All the vicious insects of the undergrowth came out and fell joyfully upon his naked white skin, but he dared not slap, or scarcely even wriggle, and only one who has been helpless under the attack of as much as a single ant can understand what fortitude was required of Blair to set his teeth and go on rather than go back to the refuge of the water. Maybe a hundred yards he crawled, though it seemed like a tortured mile. Then he stopped abruptly. Ahead of him voices sounded. The River Cat squirmed noiselessly to his side. Blair put his lips close to his ear.

"Can you understand?"

The dwarf shook his head.

"They talk their own talk. But they laugh and are merry."

Blair lay thinking and burning all over from a million stings. Then his face lighted with a twisted smile and he backed away as noiselessly as he had come. At one of the clay mounds he stopped.

"Maybe we, too, can laugh," he said to the dwarf. "Help me break away this mud with your machete."

When the joint was exposed he rose and, straddling one trunk, lifted the end quietly clear of the other. Then he turned and grinned at the dwarf like a boy.

THE return was an easy matter, of course, and fast. Faster than necessary. But Blair, now that the clearing of the road had been accomplished, was consumed with anxiety to know whether the potential disaster that he had left behind him had befallen. It was with a feeling of exultation greater than the material fact itself that he saw the *batelão* with its cargo of all his hopes still floating peacefully in the open lagoon.

Jim sat very much as he had left him, moody and heavy with the responsibility of a duty to be done; but it seemed that his expression was more satisfiedly truculent than before, indicative almost of a duty well done. Pete was in the cabin, the look of cold calculation on his face replaced by sulkiness; and it seemed as if he was a trifle more disheveled than he had been. Blair laughed whole-heartedly as he climbed on board. But that laugh might well have been one of satisfaction at his success. He asked no questions. All that he said was:

"Good for you, Jim!" And then, "Found a regular pipe-line up there coming out of the water, and back in the woods where they burn the stuff I guess they have some kind of a blower. I disconnected the pipe, and all's clear now. I suppose you haven't changed your mind about going ahead?"

"—— no!" exploded Jim. And added, "Pete has."

He looked up under his eyebrows at Blair and then, for the first time in long weeks, grinned. Into Blair's mind came the thought that this great animal was not without certain good points which could be brought out by careful handling, and on the heels of that, another thought that an animal was far superior to a snake that needed careful watching. He did not consult the latter, but gave the order to the River Cat, indicating the crew with a motion of his head as he scrambled into clothes.

"Tell 'em about it and get 'em started. We'll shoot through before those jolly fellows at the pumping station can find out what's wrong and do anything about it."

The River Cat launched into a speech in the Geral, elaborating on the adventure and explaining what a mighty exorciser of witchcraft was the padrão and what an able assistant he had in himself. The men drank in the marvel with wide-eyed wonder and when the dwarf gave the word, "*Awai-angh, pheo anâl*" they bent to their oars without fear, and the boat swung into the dim canal like a power launch. Again the signal drumming sounded in the jungle, and the white men laughed. Blair muttered—

"Considerable joke on us if some wise bird has had the merry thought of inspecting the line."

But those men in the jungle were underlings, mere fire-tenders, neophytes probably of the Wise One who had devised the clever plan, and to no one of them had it occurred that a shrewd leader of the invading *blancos* might have done something about their witchcraft. The *batelão* raced along past the place where the vapor had met it before, only a faint odor hanging in the air betokening the choking death that had filled it an hour ago. A commotion arose back in the jungle, excited chattering and cries of consternation. Then a furious drumming. Blair laughed without anxiety and free from care.

"Signaling home that the ghost didn't walk. That means we're through, and there's lots of gold, so I've been told, on the banks of the poison creek-o."

Pete emerged with sublime shamelessness from his sulk at that potent word.

"I'll hand it to you, Mr. Blair, for pulling us through a hard trail to a good finish, and if I can't persuade those savages up there that they need ten-cent knives and small junk more than they need gold, my name isn't Petros Kuyumjian."

Blair could do no other than to marvel at the man, and so accustomed had he grown to suspecting Pete's motives that he could not help wondering just why he had chosen this hour for ingratiating himself. Then in the next instant he banished the thought as unworthy. Why might it not be that the man with the trader's soul had waxed honestly enthusiastic over success? Blair himself could not altogether share the other's conviction that a boatload of useful goods would so readily appease the people who set up such a vehement unwelcome sign on their private road. The experience of more than one trader had shown that it was a risky matter to thrust one's self upon a community of Indians who had withdrawn themselves behind their jungle barriers from the white men whom they had learned to distrust.

But, Blair told himself, the trouble had always been the traders' own fault, aggravated by their conduct after getting in among a tribe who were already hostile. He felt that in their own present case, tact coupled with scrupulous fair dealing would bring these people to see reason and, as for risk, he had already become familiar with risk and he was cheerfully willing to meet more of it if it were necessary in order to emancipate himself from the horror of an office desk.

With a feeling of exhilaration, then, he planned his course of action after arrival at the stronghold of this most aloof of all tribes. What he was not taking into consideration was that a shrewd and cunning intelligence was making other plans. Some three miles after passing the poison pipe-line the water lane which they traveled opened out into a smooth, sunlit lagoon at the far end of which the steep roof apexes of *molocas* showed above the green velvet sheen of plantain trees. Beyond hung a purple cloud of low hills. Men lounged about at the waterfront with much the same air of indifference as had done those at the previous *moloca*. But the first thing noticeably different about these was their height.

The befeathered sentry who had warned the strangers off had been a tall man verging on six feet, and it seemed that he was no exception. Stalwart fellows these were, naked and without ornament of bead or bit of brass such as the Indians of lower down wore, the only resemblance they bore to those being the same expression of unfriendliness. The next noticeable thing about them was the pleasing dearth of hardware. Lower down most of the men carried some kind of a knife or a machete, old and worn though it might be, but very few of these could boast such a treasure. Pete was agog with eagerness.

"See that?" he pointed. "See how hard up they are? Here's the place to do business all right!"

"Hm, if they'll deal with us at all," said Blair. "I'm hanged if they aren't more stand-offish than I thought they'd be. Here's the place to watch your step, I'm thinking."

A single man stood at the water's edge to give the strangers a morose greeting—a tall sub-chief, decked out in the formal feather insignia of a messenger, but he carried no ornamented lance of welcome. To him Blair said:

"We come to visit. We bring presents. We demand the ceremony of breaking the cassaba bread."

To which the man replied shortly—

"The mouth of the Wise One will talk to you."

"None too darn cordial," muttered Blair. "Maybe it's rude to go visiting with rifles, but I guess we better hang on to them."

THE man grunted to the crew to stay where they were, which injunction the dwarf did not accept as applicable to himself, and scrambled ashore, too, looking suddenly startlingly troll-like among these tall, naked men of his own color. The befeathered messenger only scowled at his inclusion of himself with the white men, but he said nothing and turned abruptly to lead the way up a neatly fenced path through the banana grove. His bruskness was an irritation to Big Jim's innate sense of racial superiority.

"—— blasted sassy coon. I'd like tuh swing one on his ear," he growled.

"You'll swing nothing on nobody," Blair warned him quickly. "You won't even growl. This may turn out to be a tighter place than we figured."

Jim's answer was to growl at Blair, but before any argument could develop they debouched into the clearing. A great council *moloca* faced the center, flanked by two others on either side; a barrack with an eighty-foot front of split *paxiuba* palm trunks rising to a lofty steep-angled ridge of overhanging thatch and having not a single window-opening in the whole wide face of it; only a door which swung from cane hinges along the upper edge like a portcullis. It was customary among all the communal tribes of the river to keep this door permanently open in time of peace. Just now it was ominously shut down. But it seemed that there was some sort of a reception committee after all.

Upon a raised platform of clay abutting the front wall squatted an elderly man of grave demeanor, who wore feather insignia similar to those of the sub-chief who escorted the party, with the only difference that from his headband of toucan plumes, instead of the twin feather horns, a circle of flame-colored macaw tails radiated like the crown of the Statute of Liberty and over his broad chest hung a necklace of overlapping triangles of hammered silver. On either side of this dignified figure stood a pair of splendid brown statues holding tall blow-guns stiffly upright before their faces.

The man looked steadily at the strangers without speaking; and Blair felt curiously like a prisoner standing before a judge. He was about to repeat his formula about visiting and presents when the man said coldly—

"You are bold men and clever to come beyond the white fog which the Wise One has built against traders."

This was a greeting more like an accusation before a court. Blair was a little nonplussed by the unexpected, but he contrived to reply:

"We are bold because we come with good intent. Take us to your Wise One and we shall show him that we are no traders."

The man sat in silence again before he spoke. Then:

"So say all traders. If you come with good intent why do you carry guns? Let the young men take your guns, and the Wise One will make known his word."

His eyes, looking past the group, told Blair the significance of that reference to young men. He scarcely needed to flash a glance over his shoulder to know that all around the clearing at the edge of the jungle fringe stood tall, silent figures armed with bows and poisoned arrows or blow-guns. With that heart-stopping realization came the instant desperate impulse to fight out of it before the surrounding circle should become impossibly strong. He had heard tales enough and he had read many more of the battles put up by a handful of white men with rifles against a horde of savages. But on that thought crowded another sickening realization that his party of three white men and a dwarf might as well be surrounded by a hundred rifles, for a blow-gun at close range in the hands of an expert can be used as fast as a rifle and is infinitely more deadly.

"Better give them up, fellows," he told the others in a low voice. "We've got to talk ourselves out of this jam."

As if they understood that resistance was not to be considered, a group of men who had gathered at the *moloca* door in readiness came forward and took the rifles that the white men handed to them. The judge on the bench held his curious habit of silence before speaking, and then coldly—

"Men of good intent would not hide little guns under their clothes."

Suddenly Blair knew that this man was actually a mouthpiece; that he but relayed the orders of some keen intelligence who chose to remain unseen, probably behind the mat wall of the *moloca* from where he whispered his instructions. He knew that he would have to call upon all the wit and the presence of mind at his command to cope with this invisible power behind the throne.

Meekly enough he surrendered his pistol. Pete followed suit. But Jim was fiercely restive under the disarmament.

"Blast his hide for the freshest coon I ever struck. If any one of his filthy niggers lays a paw on me I'm gonna jump that stage an' bust him wide open f'r a start, I don't give a hoot in —— what happens."

His was the recklessness of the bull male who feels himself assaulted and must retaliate in a blind fury of fight, regardless of consequences.

"Shut up, Jim," Blair snapped at him. "And don't be a fool. There's nothing fresh about his frisking our guns. We've butted our nose into his country in spite of plenty of warning that we're not wanted and he's taking the precaution that we don't start anything. We're up against it, hard, and if you don't hold your fool temper you'll queer all our chances."

Fine advice from Bill Blair, the hotheaded. But Bill had been taking a grueling course in the hard school of Professor Experience, and whatever else he had been in those days left so far behind, he had never been a fool. With his own hand he took Jim's gun from his waistband and handed it to a sullen-faced, expressionless youth. After the silence the judge spoke.

"Kariwa is wise to avert death and to learn the chance of life. This is the word of the Wise One. Among our men are many who have dealt with traders in the rubber jungles. Always have the traders lied and cheated and killed our people. Therefore it is our custom that no traders shall come among us. Still you have come despite the warning and the witchcraft. Yet the Wise One is wise. This is his word. He will trade for the goods in your *batelão* which our people need."

For a moment it seemed to Blair that he was not hearing aright. Then the heavy cloud of his anxiety lifted. Having insisted upon proof of peaceable intent, these people were amenable to reason after all. Of course they needed the trade goods in the boat. They were desperately in want of the commonest utensils. In his elation it did not occur to Blair to inquire of himself what was to prevent these people from just taking what they wanted. But it was only for a very short moment that he was permitted to congratulate himself. The mouthpiece continued with inexorable impersonality to pronounce sentence.

"He will trade them against your lives, which he gives back to you. Also your boat, so that you may go back and give warning to other traders!"

Blair's heart stopped. With it his pulse and breath and all his functions. It was the cold finality of the thing that hit him with such benumbing force. Haled to judgment and condemned without having been allowed to plead his defense. This was the end of everything. All his labor, all his suffering, all his lessons which had been so hard to learn had come to this futile end. Far away he heard a voice, chattering, crying and cursing. It was Pete, explaining hysterically to Big Jim that all was lost. Blair felt aloofly disinterested in the griefs of Pete. Through the dead numbness of his brain came a sense of bitterness oozing. It was the cynical reminder of his uncle.

"Opinionated, pig-headed, and lacking guts."

He had been opinionated enough to stake his everything on a gamble against fate, and fate stood by, laughing. He could see his uncle laughing, too, with the I-told-you-so expression of a man who has proved himself in his own business. The natural aggressiveness of Blair began to overcome the shock to his system. His thoughts commenced to function again. Anger began to overlay his bitterness, the anger of rebellion against his uncle's dictum. Well, —— him, he had at least shown him that he had the guts to pull through to the end. And if he was pig-headed, all right, he was pig-headed enough not to quit now. He strode forward a step and shouted his decision.

"I won't go back with an empty boat. I won't talk with a mouthpiece. Bring me to this Wise One and I will show h—"

THE stiff guards on either side of the mouthpiece had lowered their long tubes, and they held them poised and alert, as a trap-shooter holds his gun ready for snap action. An instant Blair halted open-mouthed, cut off in mid-word, and then he knew that their eyes were directed over his shoulder. He knew why, without hearing Big Jim's ursine growl, and all his own plan and intention was immediately obliterated by the desperate need to stop that insensate animal before he should bring destruction upon them all. He turned and threw himself at Jim just as he was lurching forward with his

great hands clutching out before him and with red madness in his eyes.

"Jim! You crazy fool!"

He flung his arms round the other's waist, low beneath the reaching hands, and twined his heel behind the farther leg. The big fellow beat furiously at his back. But Blair's sudden charge threw him off his balance. He sprawled, cursing, with Blair on top.

"Leggo o' me, blast yuh! Lemme get me hands on that talkin' idol! Tell a white man where to get off, huh! I'll show 'm how to talk to me!"

Strong brown hands reached down and clutched at his limbs, and muscular knees pinned them down. Blair got up, glad to be able to leave that maniac in other hands and to be able to press his own demand. The mouthpiece was speaking again, pronouncing leniency upon his judgment.

"Kariwa is a wise leader of men. No man sees the Wise One, but some of the greater witch-doctors. But this is his word. Among us is another custom. When there is dispute between our people and another people, in order to avoid much killing one of our men fights with one of their men, and who wins has the right of the dispute. That big one wants to fight. Good. Tomorrow he will fight one of our men. If he wins, your side has the right, and your goods with your lives are yours. If our side wins, we have the right, and your goods with your lives are ours. Tomorrow will be the fight."

That verdict was final. That Wise One who passed his judgments so mysteriously was an inexorable autocrat. Having decided according to his whim, there was no further choice for the prisoners, which was what Blair knew themselves to be. The mouthpiece pointed silently, and immediately men closed round them. There was no violence, no hustling; they merely indicated direction with their blow-guns. Even Big Jim had sense enough to go peaceably. The guards led the way to a path through the banana grove, showed the prisoners into a hut, and left them alone. Just a flimsy grass hut with an open oblong for a door and walls of matting through which one could see. But it occurred to no one of them to try to escape. The River Cat accepted the situation with his cheerful fatalism.

"Here is time to talk. Better is speech on a full belly. I go to demand of those tall guards that they give me passage to the *batelão*."

The white men were left alone to their recriminations, and they would have been super-angelic had they not felt the need of telling each other many things out of their tried souls. Big Jim, of course, furiously assailed Blair for giving up their weapons. If he had had his gun, he would have shown those people of an inferior race what a white man could do; he didn't care how many of them there were. All of which was manifestly absurd. He might have snatched a gun and fired it off once before a thin sliver of hard wood would have punctured his skin, and within ten seconds he would have ceased to move.

Pete ranged from fits of morose despair to fits of wringing his hands and wailing. If it had been his boat he would have done differently. But who could reason with a man who held ideas of business so foolish as Blair? Only the rawest trader ever went into a market with all his goods, holding none in reserve. If he had been listened to, he would have hidden half the goods somewhere before coming up to this community of unknown possibilities, and now they would have their boat and could pick up at least half of their gear to start with all over again; and that would be no so very great calamity, for all they would have to do would be to charge twice as much. As for this decision to rest upon a fight, there was no saving grace in that at all except that they did not all have to fight. There was a trick to it. Mark his words, there was a trick to it somewhere.

Blair held his hands to his ears against this ceaseless bleat and told Pete to shut up. But he agreed with him.

"This isn't going to be any kind of a cinch," he told Jim. "The idea seems to be some crude form of trial by combat. I don't know whether there's any way-back connection, but let me tell you this—the Aztecs had such a form of trial. So had the Incas. They'd give a condemned prisoner a chance. They'd chain him by one leg to a ring bolt and let him choose his weapon and then they'd send six warriors up against him. If he won, he was innocent. I don't know what this game is going to be, but I do know that this secretive witch-doctor fellow who runs this tribe from off stage is nobody's fool, and if he thought you'd stand a chance he wouldn't have given it to you. It's going to be some fight that you wished on to yourself with your crazy temper."

But Big Jim had all the supreme confidence of his type of big man in his own size and strength and bull courage. He suffered, in fact, from the superiority complex. It was no mere bravado with him; he was just inherently reliant upon his own might. His sneer was ungracious.

"Aw shucks! I ain't scared, if you are. They ain't no coon injun built 'at I can't tear wide open, I don't care what he fights with."

And that was the burden of his boast for the rest of the evening. With the following morning he was the only one of the three who remained confidently untroubled. In fact, he almost looked forward with a sort of angry belligerence to the opportunity to repay some of the indignities to which he had been submitted upon the person of a representative of the tribe that had so treated him. It is the same spirit that enables a pugilistic aspirant to face the mightiest man of his hands in the world. Big Jim's face, as they were led out to the clearing before the *molocas*, wore a scowl of pleasurable truculence.

The speaker for the invisible ruler sat as before upon the platform in front of the council *moloca* with his statuesque guards. Evidently his function today was that of master of ceremonies. And this was to be distinctly a ceremony. Men squatted in silent rows all round the clearing. No women were in sight. In the center of the clearing five spears had been thrust upright into the ground in pentagon form. At each spear stood a man, five in all, under the direction of a befeathered chief.

"The ring," Blair thought to himself immediately, "and ring keepers."

He wondered if there might be any significance in the number. The dwarf at his side seemed to understand his thought.

"Five is the number of the *molocas*," he muttered. "A spear to each, so are all represented!"

And Blair could see then that the feather decoration on the haft of each spear differed from the others.

Their guards led them up to the edge of the platform and arranged themselves a semicircle behind them. The mouthpiece addressed them without preamble, or rather, he addressed himself to Blair.

"This is our rule, *Kariwa*, which explain to the big one. One man only from each side fights. Who wins, goes free. Who loses, dies. Who interferes, dies first. Also, since our side offers this trial, your side may choose how the fight shall be."

"You mean with what weapons?" Blair asked quickly, wondering at this quixotic chivalry on the part of these savages.

"Such is the word of the Wise One, excepting the white man's guns."

At that reminder of the cunning power behind the veil Blair should have suspected. That crafty magic-maker was no fool to make such a concession without having something up his sleeve. But Blair was so suddenly exalted at the unhoped-for chance for victory that he overlooked everything in his hurry to explain the conditions to Big Jim.

Jim's truculent scowl melted into a ferocious fighting grin as he understood the incredible gift that a foolish custom of combat presented to him.

"I can choose muh weapons, he says? Is he coocoo? Yee-eeow! Then I'll fight six of 'em right like I am, with me bare hands. Bring him on, tell him. He's my meat."

Blair translated, half expecting still to meet some demur about a method of combat so unaccustomed to the savage mind. But the Wise One's deputy accepted the condition with unruffled calm, and for the first time the corners of his mouth twitched and he almost smiled. He signaled. A man at the *moloca* door grunted a call, and then Blair saw the trap that had been so carefully laid for them and into which they had fallen with such simple credulity.

Escorted by two men, painted with *genipapa* vermillion in diamond designs all over their bodies and carrying tortoiseshell rattles—witch-doctors obviously—a perfectly enormous naked man emerged. A freak. The witch men were well up to the average of the tribal stature, verging on six feet. But this colossus topped them by a full head. Seven feet high he must have been, and was far from being a reed whose substance had all gone into height. He was heavily muscled in proportion. His chest and shoulders were as broad as were the River Cat's, who had gone into exaggerated breadth to make up for lack of height, and his great limbs matched. His arms and thighs were in ponderous proportion. Ponderous, because the bulging muscles were just a little too much overlaid with unnecessary flesh due to an insufficiency of hard exertion. Not often was this giant

called upon to fight. He was the local Goliath, the tribal champion whom his confreres matched against their deluded enemies with a savage sense of humor at the titanic joke.

This was what the assembled tribe was waiting for. A gale of laughter went round the squatting circle of warriors. They rocked on their haunches and slapped their knees as they guffawed in enjoyment of the jest, and they looked to see the consternation in the chosen victim's face and to laugh the more.

But Big Jim remained truculently confident. One of the few, perhaps the only good point in his character was an indomitable courage due to lack of imagination to see danger.

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall," he quoted the dictum of an old master of the ring.

But Blair felt not so easy in mind.

"You'll have to watch out, Jim," he warned him. "Nobody can afford to underrate that mountain. He's big enough and strong enough to tear an arm clear out of its socket if he ever gets the right hold on you."

"Ah, quit croakin'," snarled Jim. "He ain't gonna get no hold. He's slow as a house. An' what does them Injuns know about a swing on the jaw? I'm two hundred pounds o' white man in hard condition, an' what I hits good an' square drops. This ain't gonna be more than one round."

His preparations were as crude as his ideas. He threw aside his hat and ripped off the raggy ends of his shirt sleeves. Coat, he had none. He was ready and primed with confidence in his strength and his half knowledge of fist fighting against unsuspecting brute force.

THERE was no need to urge either gladiator into the ring. The Goliath was equally supremely confident in his knowledge of easy past victories. His expression, as he waited the word to annihilate the white man, was the usual among primitive minds—a scowl of horrid ferocity in order to strike terror into the heart of his opponent. He leaped ponderously into the air, slapped his thighs and chest with his huge hands and opened his great mouth and roared. The challenge was inarticulate, but the squatting tribesmen must have found a meaning, for they guffawed and shouted encouragement. Blair, with the queer tricks played by racing thoughts in a tense situation, found himself remembering that so does a gorilla face the white hunter, beating its chest and roaring before rending him limb from limb. And Jim, just as the white hunter faces the enormous brute with cool confidence in the weapon that civilized knowledge has given him, faced the huge savage with supreme confidence in his civilized knowledge of a knockout punch. Confident and savagely glad of the opportunity, he crouched with a fighting grin on his face that displayed all his front teeth, almost as animal as the giant who roared at him.

"The men are ready. Let the fight begin," ordered the mouthpiece of the Wise One.

One round, Big Jim had prophesied in the pride of his strength, and horribly true was his boast. Blair, looking over the shoulders of the guards who hemmed him round, saw the big fellow set himself and felt that he was glad that the other had been in no such hard condition when he had fought him. Jim braced his feet wide apart, body leaning over and his big right fist swinging low by his thigh. Flagrantly wide open. But what did the savage know about the deadening shock of a blow landed upon the point of the chin? He advanced upon the white man, roaring, his thick fingers outstretched to seize and twist and tear.

Jim grunted with the force of his tremendous swing. It was a crushing blow, picked right up from the ground, as a pugilist would say. A blow such as even a world's champion seldom finds so wide open an opportunity to land. Unfortunately for him, fate in its slow cycle was dealing out to him the same mischance that it had dealt to Blair when the two had fought. Just as Blair had lacked professional accuracy, so did Jim lack the perfect judgment of time and distance to plant his first blow unerringly upon the fatal spot. As the unskilled nearly always do, he struck high. His fist grazed the jaw and smashed into the angle of the giant's nose and eye, a frightfully painful but not a vulnerable spot.

Vast as the savage was, the blow jarred him to his heels. He lurched back, a hand clapped to his nose and blood fairly spouting between his fingers.

"Am-ma-ah!" a gasp went up from the circle of his tribe.

But the man was too big to be injured by a blow like that. He roared his pain and surprize and rushed upon the white man. Jim sidestepped, and the mountain blundered on. There would have been an opportunity for an alert man. But Jim was a slow thinker. He let his chance slip. The savage turned and rushed again. Jim contrived to avoid him once more; he was not ready yet. From the partizan circle came shrill whistles and the slapping of palms upon bare buttocks. So obviously the counterpart of cat-calls from the gallery that Jim, with his superiority complex, was stung into showing off before he was properly set, and the end came then with horrid suddenness.

The giant rushed, and Jim swung again with all his force. Another tremendous blow. Better this time, but too hasty. Only by fractions of an inch it missed the point and crashed into the throat. The giant staggered back in short steps on his heels, head back and gagging over his roars of fury, sprinkling blood in crimson arcs from his shattered nose. Once again any quick thinking professional could have jumped in and finished him off. But Jim's reaction was sluggish, and when he acted, he moved too late. The giant, lurching backward in gorilloid rage, found his hand upon a weapon to which it was well accustomed—one of the spears that bounded the pentagon of battle. With the familiar touch, his fury swept over his little reason in a hot wave. The old killing lust of primal man blazed up in all its uncontrollable heat. He tore the spear from the ground and, just as Jim saw his belated opportunity and leaped forward, struck.

The muddy blade stood out a yard beyond the white man's back, and instantly the orange toucan feather scroll about the haft began to redden against his shirt pocket. Jim toppled forward. For a moment he poised on wide spread legs and spear-butt, as on a tripod, his arms hanging horrible and slack, and then one of the legs gave way and the body thudded to the ground.

IN THE long, dead moment that followed Blair was aware of only one sentiment. Foul! A foul and brutal shattering of all rules! He knew nothing of the sense of fair play that these savages might have, but this was a base treachery against the very crudest sort of decency. Then came the hot rage of vengeance, the blazing impulse of civilized man to punish a despicable act of perfidy. He realized suddenly that guards were holding his arms and that he tore away from them and was shouting to the director of ceremonies as to an umpire:

"Foul! I claim a foul! That is no fair contest! I claim the right to take up the fight with that man beast!"

He began to realize, too, that his was the only voice raised. A hush had fallen over the whole wide circle of the spectators. It was clear that their champion in his insensate rage had committed an enormity. The mouthpiece, too, had gone into his silence, listening for his instructions. Blair's words died away in his throat, but his burning indignation remained. At that moment he felt sure that he could defeat that clumsy hulk and take a fierce joy in doing it. He was not as heavy as Big Jim, but he stood six feet of hard athletic man himself, and he had seen chances that the slow-witted Jim had missed. He would let nothing like that escape him. Then the mouthpiece was speaking again.

"It was no contest. The man has brought shame upon the *moloca* of the spear. Your side has the right to fight him with whatever weapon you will."

With the sudden acceptance of his hot challenge Blair's brain cooled and his thoughts raced to consider every possible angle of advantage. Weapons, of course, did not include guns. They meant only such as were familiar to the tribe. Was there any tool, then, in the use of which speed and presence of mind would overbalance familiarity? He could think of none. Fists, the white man's natural weapon, would be the only method of offence which would swing the balance of familiarity to his side. A desperately small advantage against such odds, yet it was the best available, and he was fiercely ready to make the most of it.

He became aware of the River Cat tugging at his sleeve.

"Padrão! Oh, padrão! Listen. Let me fight him, padrão."

Blair was amazed. What savage weapon was the dwarf familiar with which he thought would offset his discrepancy? And yet, as he looked at him, Blair felt that the disadvantage was not so very absurd if there might be some suitable weapon. It

was only in the legs that nature had dwarfed the phenomenon. His torso was that of a heavyweight wrestler, more powerful than either Blair's or Big Jim's; as massive as the giant's, and much harder.

"Listen, padrão. Come down close. That —— of a witch-doctor may be wise enough to understand even Portuguese. Listen. I am Ohkohthithero of the rivers. All water is my water. Like the *gato do mar*, I see under the water and stay, holding my breath. Let me fight that great bull in the water."

Blair could have shouted. Of course that was where his advantage lay! How stupid of his civilized mind to think of fighting only in terms of fists or guns! In the water, unless the giant should happen to be an exceptional swimmer, he with his swimming powers would hold a tremendous advantage.

"Good," he said to the River Cat. "That was a good thought. I will fight him swimming."

"But, padrão, listen yet." The River Cat clung to his arm. "Padrão is a mighty man of the water, I have seen. But I am Ohkohthithero, better than a man. And listen, padrão. This is a matter of more than a vengeance. It is a matter of winning the right to buy the gold in quills for which padrão has come so far."

Blair was torn between emotions. His hot blood clamored for the punishment of the murderer, and he was ready to pit his life against the task. And yet his skill might not be adequate. The River Cat was, beyond any doubt, an infinitely better man than himself; as much a freak in the water as that great brute was on land. And as for pitting his life, he had already pitted it in a gamble against fate. It would be hard, very hard, to withdraw now after his loud challenge and to bring derision upon himself by giving place to a cripple. And yet again—how long ago had he heard it?—"Too—— set in your own opinion to listen to anybody else."

Bill Blair flung his head up with a growl. He had decided. He would forego this contest in favor of the River Cat and would accept whatever derision came. And there, as a matter of fact, he had already won his own fight. He turned sharply to the mouthpiece.

"The fight may be according to my choosing? And if my side wins we have the right to our goods and our lives? Good! Then my friend, this dwarf, will fight that giant. In two canoes will they go out to the middle of the lagoon where that coward can not reach for a spear and there they will fight with their bare hands."

The astonishment occasioned by this bizarre challenge left no room for derision. The squatting circle of men uttered explosive grunts of wonder. They clicked their tongues and clapped their hands over their mouths. Blair could not understand their comments in their own dialect, but one man called in the Geral—

"Is it a magic, *Kariwa*, that the great little one has?"

The mouthpiece relayed his instructions without a flicker of emotion.

"The word of the Wise One is that such a fight is within the rules, that the warrior who has brought shame upon the spear of a *moloca* requires no rest, that the fight shall be now."

The River Cat grinned like a gargoyle.

"Pity that there are not two such champions, padrão, so we might together show these people what men are we of the waters."

The guards closed round the two white men and the River Cat once more. The spectators got up and trooped off down to the waterfront. At some unseen signal women came from behind a *moloca* and carried away the body of Jim. A remarkable thing about this hidden away tribe was the orderliness and decision with which they did things. There was none of the confusion about the unusual arrangements for this contest that would be expected from most of the river tribes. It seemed as if the wise old maker of witchcraft had imposed upon them, along with his autocratic rule, some of his quick decision.

THE five spear guards of the ring under their befeathered chief automatically took charge. Blair found time to notice that the ornamented spears themselves were emblems of authority, backed, apparently, by the communal weight of opinion of the respective *molocas* which they represented. When a spear bearer stretched out his emblem to make way or to hold back the crowd, the crowd obeyed. Blair noticed, too, that the fifth spear, the polluted one, was missing.

At the beach the directing mouthpiece wanted to know what kind of a canoe the

dwarf desired and what kind of a paddle, for in his mind this thing could be none other than a naval battle.

"Any kind, any size," said the dwarf. "Look, this one-man *uba* with a split paddle will serve. Enough. I go. Send that buffalo out to meet me if he be not afraid."

The same spirit again. That supreme confidence of victory which actuates the fighting man, whether civilized white or naked savage. Blair was very much more easy in his mind about this trial by combat than he had been about the other. He felt that he himself would win under these conditions, and he admitted freely that the phenomenal dwarf was his immeasurable superior in everything connected with the water. He admitted, too, with a curious sense of disloyalty to the dead that the dwarf was Big Jim's superior in intelligence —not in knowledge, which is a mere accumulation of facts, but in quick-thinking native wit. He would let no opportunities slip by on account of failure to grasp their fullest possibilities the instant that they opened.

He called to the grotesque who was testing the feel of his paddle in the water, conveying the startling appearance, as when Blair had first seen him, of standing upright on the bottom with his body protruding through a hole in the canoe.

"*Amigo.* You go to fight in my place, and you come back as my partner in this whole adventure."

The dwarf spun his canoe with a dexterous stroke and answered only—

"Assuredly I come back, and that with speed."

It was the very equivalent of saying "in one round." He drove his blade in a long, sweeping stroke, and the clumsy dugout sprinted into way as if pushed off from solid land. The giant wedged his bulk into a canoe of similar size and in Gargantuan contrast to the gargoyle dwarf, gave the impression of a dinosaur being led to slaughter. His chest was clotted with blood from his smashed nose. Wide across his cheek was a smear of it where he had wiped it from his mouth with his arm. And he was nervously sulky as a beast that scents disaster.

There was an extravagant irregularity about this whole thing, a grotesque unnaturalness that filled his dull intellect with forebodings of magic, of dealing with some evil goblin of the jungle. It was his not unpleasant business to fight; distinctly agreeable in fact, since he always won. But these queer strangers from the outside who looked upon his immensity and were not at all afraid and who elected to fight with empty hands and fought, withal, so terribly, were something new in his experience. Uncomfortably new. And now they had elected to match against his enormity this massive dwarf who looked so grimly efficient in his little canoe.

The dwarf was calling to him now tauntingly from out in the lagoon. A tall youth on the bank passed some comment that drew a guffaw from his neighbors; something so well appreciated that they had to pass it on, and the laugh that followed it was broad with derision. They were very like any other fight fans, these people who had had spirit enough to resent the exploitation of traders. Their natural sympathy was with their champion, but they wanted a winning champion, not a hesitant one.

Their derision served to add the stimulus of anger to the champion's sulkiness. He plunged his paddle into the water furiously and went out to redeem his self-esteem. Immediately there was a hurrying and a pushing among the crowd to draw every available craft out of the reeds and to pile in to the limit that the traffic would bear. With shouting and scuffling and many upsets and much laughing the whole tribal fleet paddled out, loaded down awash. Among the disappointed ones on the steep slope remained the director of ceremonies, whose dignity had not permitted him to participate in the scramble for ringside seats. With him were his guards and the emblematic spear bearers and Blair and Pete.

Blair tingled with the excitement of the spectacle, free from apprehension.

"Give the word, Mouthpiece of the Wise One," he urged.

The mouthpiece seemed to be flustered at the absence of authority behind his ears. But there was no need.

"Look! They commence." He pointed. "Ah! He will cut your man down!"

The giant was driving his canoe with furious strokes straight at the dwarf's, who sat still and watched him with supreme indifference. Blair waited to see some sort of an exhibition of extraordinary skill, some spectacular stroke of canoemanship at the last moment which would avoid the charge

by a miracle of bare inches. But the dwarf squatted toad-like at the stern and floated broadside on without making a move. In another second it would be too late even for a miracle.

"Look out!" Blair could not hold himself from shouting.

But almost before the sound of his voice could have carried across that short distance the charging canoe crashed into the other full amidships. Over it rolled as smoothly as a log. The attacker rode up on it for a third of its length and then it, too, in spite of the frantic waving of the giant's arms in his attempt to hold the balance, rolled.

"Amm-ma-a-ah!" came a murmuring wave from the assembled fleet.

There was the giant swimming around alone. No other head bobbed up. The tension drew into long seconds. The mouthpiece voiced an unexpected sentiment.

"Almost I might have wished that your side could win, for the man has brought great shame upon a whole *moloca*."

Suddenly the giant shouted horrid surprize and began to flail the water with his great arms. This way and that he heaved his body and twisted, clawing into the empty air. But with each frenzied heave his head sank lower. Lower, till only his face with goggling eyeballs was above and his hands clutched wildly up at nothing. Then gurglingly it was gone.

"Whau!" The wave from the fleet was a roar of breakers. And, "Amm-mu-i-quá! What devil craft is that?" murmured the mouthpiece. "So does a man when the caiman seizes him."

The surface of the water swirled and bubbled and eddied in twisting whirls. Once with a vast splashing a leg kicked clear, thrashed a moment and disappeared. A long stillness while men held their breaths. Then the water broke in a cascade, and half the length of the giant's body appeared, heaved up from the very bottom apparently, and again the surrounding fleet groaned amazement. Clinging to his head and shoulders, like the horrible old man of the sea, was the gnarled shape of the dwarf.

With spluttering bellows, partly of rage but more of terror, the giant lifted his great arms to tear at the strangling shape. Wisely the dwarf, as if pushing off from a float, pushed away with his legs and swam easily aside, grinning warily. The giant so far from plowing on to an attack, turned with desperate strokes and took hold of one of the overturned canoes, to which he clung, blowing and choking.

WITH a repetition of ancient history in like case, the dwarf taunted him to let go and come forth to the fight. David taunting Goliath. But Goliath only hung on, too spent even to glare. The Philistines of the fleet, some of his own tribe, began to jeer. The whistles and buttock-slapping that had stung Big Jim to indiscretion were directed at their own champion. But the champion suffered from no superiority complex; the cat-calls of the mob did not hurt him. He hung on and puffed and spat water from his lungs. Then the dwarf did a fearsome thing.

Close in front of the giant he trod water and grimaced. His eyes opened to their fullest demoniac glare, his grin widened till his cavernous mouth split his face in half, showing all his teeth like some hungry hobgoblin of the blackest jungle. Then slowly, very slowly, his mouth still voraciously agape, he sank beneath the surface.

The giant screamed at the uncanny horror of the thing, and by the spasmodic heave of his shoulders it was evident that his impulse was to snatch his legs up out of the depth. With desperate effort he threw one leg over the upturned canoe and tried to hoist his body on to it. But it only rolled smoothly as a log, and its buoyancy was far short of supporting his weight. Suddenly he screamed in panic again and tugged convulsively at his trailing leg.

"Amm-mwé-éh!"

The shuddering gasp once more. The horror had him by the leg below water. The giant screamed hoarsely and beat with his fist in insane fear at the surface of the water, which suddenly tinged with crimson. Panic seized him and he gave up his last advantage. He let go his hold on the canoe to thrash with both great fists at the reddening water. That was his last hope. As the caiman drags its victim, he was drawn under.

The fleet waited, rigid and staring. The surface commotion subsided. Bubbles came up through the dispersing tinge of carmine. The water became placid. A little farther another bubble. Still the fleet waited. To Blair it seemed that he waited with pent

breath for many minutes. Nothing happened. Good ——, no man could stay under that long!

And then suddenly, away beyond the circle of canoes, close in shore a broad, brown hand reached out, took hold in its inimitable fashion and hoisted to the light the River Cat. He blew whistlingly like a *manatee*, drew a couple of great, sucking inhalations and rolled into his long dragging crawl. A few strokes brought him to the shore. He climbed out and stood bow-legged, panting hugely, his long arms hanging low where he could clutch the grass to steady himself. Then he shook the water in a circle from his mop of hair and grinned. At that human action Blair was able to find words.

"Is—is it finished? When he comes up will he—"

The water freak cleared his throat and spat with deliberation.

"It is well finished, padrão. He will not come up. I stuffed him well into the mud. But—phthu-u-agh! I had to bite him in the leg to make him let go. *Bom*, what says the mouthpiece? Are we free?"

That very practical question served to focus Blair's half forming, racing thoughts on to the more immediate need of settling the question now of his status. He turned aggressively to the man, who was still gazing fascinated out over the water as if expecting yet to see a great body roll up from under.

"What now? Say, Mouthpiece of the Wise One, does the word hold good that he who wins has the right?"

But the man was only a mouthpiece. He signed to the guards, who immediately closed round and escorted them back to the baked clay bench of judgment. Blair, looking back all the time with anxious fascination, saw the fleet scattered over the lagoon, men gesticulating and peering into the water for a body that would never come up.

At the council *moloca* the mouthpiece took his seat with all the dignity of an augur to wait for the still small voice that should come to him. Blair was on tenter-hooks. Would this savage, the power behind the throne, stand behind an agreement that had been made with the full conviction that the tribal champion must surely win? He looked at Pete. Pete was evidently under a fearful tension. His swarthy complexion was blanched, his eyes were wide and staring, his face twitched, and he picked nervously at a fingernail with his teeth. In uncomplimentary contrast was the River Cat, who balanced on one leg, and, without stooping, picked the sticky black mud from between his toes while he discoursed in low tones with one of the guards about the merits of blow-guns. At last the judge handed down the verdict with the same grave impartiality that he had ordered the battle to the death.

"The word of the Wise One is that your lives are yours and your goods are your own to do as you will."

"Whee-ee-eeyow!"

Pete's squeal cut into the sober formality of the occasion like a locomotive whistle tears into a still night. Without restraint he capered his relief at the reprieve and his beatification at the permission to trade in this market, so starved for his wares. Blair under other circumstances might have shouted too. But two things restrained him. One was that Pete shouted with such vulgar unrestraint and another was a vague feeling that it would not be quite the decent thing to do to exult so openly over his own good fortune with Big Jim barely an hour murdered and not yet buried, even though the man had been a gross character, impossible either to like or to respect. He was dominated rather by his accepted obsession against being tarred with the trading brush. To the mouthpiece he said with sudden imperiousness:

"I have said that we are no traders. I came to buy gold in quills. Take me before your Wise One and I will place my demand before him."

The man's reply dazed him and brought Pete's unseemly transports to an abrupt end.

"We have no gold to trade. The Wise One sees nobody. You are free to go."

With that he rose, stepped from the seat of judgment and disappeared into the *moloca*. The tall guards with the blow-guns relaxed their vigilance and strolled away. The white men were left amazingly alone, standing in an empty clearing before a bare platform of clay. Blair experienced a ridiculous feeling of foolishness, as if the whole fantastic events of the morning had been no more than a hideously realistic play, and the players, their parts done, had quietly walked off the stage. They were free to go. But where?

The River Cat offered a practical suggestion.

"My belly is empty like a drum. In the *batelão* is food."

THE thought was a good one. They crossed the clearing and went through the banana grove unhindered. There was nobody to meet. All the village was still at the beach. Out on the lagoon some canoes still lingered. Some had come in, and their men stood talking with much gesticulation and repeating to one another the details of the marvel that had befallen. They looked at the white men with a certain wonder, but not, apparently, with any of the hostility that had greeted their coming. It seemed that the trial by combat, according to the inexorable law of custom, had wiped the slate clean.

The *batelão* had been towed a little distance away from the actual landing place and tied securely to a stake, evidently awaiting the Wise One's decision as to its disposal. The crew lounged in enjoyment of their rest. Being Indians, they had not been molested. Viewing it after that full morning and the anxious day before, it seemed to Blair that a week had passed since they had landed so full of hopes.

And where were their hopes now?

They had won the right to their lives and to their goods. But of what value were their goods if there was no gold to be bought with them? What other produce could these savages have that would be worth transporting even a mile?

Pete suddenly laughed like a fox's bark.

"He lies. —— him, he lies. I dunno why, but I known darn well they've got gold here. Those fellows told us down river, and we haven't taken any wrong detour. Sure there's gold. I can smell it, I tell you. And what's more, I'm going to find it. I don't want any grub. Gimme a pocketful of trading truck and you see if I don't roust out the other pocket full of quills."

Blair felt, too, that there was some mystery about this denial that needed to be unearthed, but he was mistrustful of Pete's methods.

"No trader business, Pete," he warned him sharply. "We've saved our bacon by the skin of our teeth, and don't you go around trying to skin anybody else now."

Pete had always been at least polite. He had sulked and he had shirked and he had plotted by hook or by crook to get possession of the *batelão* with its princely trading outfit, but he had warily avoided entering into any direct argument. But now he smelled gold.

Gold, that potent metal that has so often demonstrated its magic power to stir in men the most desperate of emotions. His nearness to gold, his passion to get his fingers upon it gave him the sudden courage to snarl at Blair and the greater courage to circulate alone among these Indians who an hour ago would have whooped delight to have seen him torn apart.

"What the —— do you care if I skin anybody? Did these savages give us any fair chance? Quit being a fool, Blair. We've been through —— to get here after this gold, and it'll take all —— to keep me from it now."

He stuffed an assortment of small goods into his pockets and scurried away up the path through the banana grove. The River Cat, of course, had understood nothing of the little flare-up, but he spat impassively over the side.

"Pity," he said, "that that one was not killed also. He is the more dangerous, and will do us a harm yet."

Blair remembered that he had yet to express his appreciation to the dwarf for the astounding fight that he had put up, which had so happily snatched them from under the very heel of impending disaster.

"True," he told him. "He is more dangerous because he has much more cunning and has much less principle. But the killing of one of our party is already too much. Well have you avenged that one, River Cat. And, as I have said, the share that was to be his is now yours."

But the River Cat was a disconcerting person to try to compliment. He was trammeled by no civilized hallucinations about the value of human life just because it happened to be white. He was just a cold-blooded savage and, therefore, entirely practical. He grinned.

"Padrão knows that that gringo was at no time worthy of a vengeance. I fought for the goods and the gear that the *batelão* contains, with which padrão will buy gold. As for a share. What will I do with gold? Can I eat it? I am *capitão* of padrão's boat. It is enough. My only word is, kill that other gringo before he does us a harm."

Blair was aware of the danger well enough. He had known from the beginning that

Pete devoted twenty-four hours a day seven days a week to the earnest consideration of the material welfare of Mr. Petros Kuyumjian and that no silly inhibitions of decency would be permitted to stand in the way of that personal welfare, provided that not too much personal risk were required. And now the cumulative effect of hardship and hope long deferred had brought Pete to the verge of desperation. It was with regret that Blair recognized his own inhibitions which prevented him from following the dwarf's very sound advice.

It seemed, too, that in some subtle manner the shrewd old witch-doctor, who guarded the welfare of his tribe so cleverly, sensed a repulsion toward Pete.

A COUPLE of days passed. Blair, in spite of his friendly advances, in spite of tentative little presents of fish-hooks and beads, could elicit not the slightest information about gold. The men of the tribe were more than anxious to trade; they were consumed with the desire to acquire some of the treasures they needed so badly. But at the mention of gold they lowered their eyes and became sullenly uncommunicative. It was as if a strong taboo had been laid upon that word.

The River Cat had no better success. As an Indian among Indians, he circulated among the tribesmen, keeping his ears open and trying to pump information from them in conversation. But his position was unfortunate. A barrier stood between him and the others. They looked upon him with awe as a sort of half human, born of wood demons. All that he could report was that if there was any gold, it was certainly not in the possession of individuals. It must be communal property in the keeping of the cunning old witch-doctor, who sent it out in small quantities to trade with the tribes lower down as the occasion demanded.

Even Pete's sharp nose could ferret out nothing. He ran hither and yon with the avidity of a hunting ant. Like an ant he stuck tirelessly to his quest, showing up only at long intervals to snatch a half meal and to rave and curse at the closeness of the Wise One. Blair felt sure that whatever could be thought of by a fertile brain to do, Pete did. Yet his results were, if possible, poorer than those of either of the others. They were just up against a blank wall of baffling mystery.

And then one afternoon a messenger with feather trappings came to Blair and said that the mouthpiece of the Wise One would speak with him. With quickened pulse Blair hurried up the path through the banana grove. Some sort of a disclosure was going to be made, he felt sure. Otherwise, why the summons?

The mouthpiece squatted gravely upon his platform exactly as upon their first meeting. The stiff guards were in attendance. Blair felt almost as if he stood before the judgment seat again. The mouthpiece began as usual with startling absence of greeting or preamble.

"The word of the Wise One is that he has heard *Kariwa's* word that he is no trader. Good. But that other white man is a trader of traders. It is our custom which may not be broken that we have no dealing with traders. Yet by the judgment of the fight that man, being of your side, has the right to his life. This, then, is the word of the Wise One. Let *Kariwa* therefore kill that trader, and the Wise One will look upon *Kariwa's* face."

It is curious how environment affects one's reactions. A year ago at home, even half a year ago in Manaos City where ethics were not nearly so oppressive, Blair would have been indignant that any one should insult him by making so monstrous a suggestion. But all that was far away. Miles and miles away and years and years ago. Here, in Blair's immediate present, life balanced too closely on the thin edge of sudden obliteration for there to be any shock in the suggestion of wiping out one life more or less. Blair was accordingly no more than mildly speculative about the cold bloodthirstiness of the grand wizard. He regretted, he told the deputy. It was not the custom in his country to kill for so little reason.

"And yet," the mouthpiece almost flashed back at him, so quick was the reply, "the Wise One has heard that in the country of the white men gold is reason enough for much killing."

Blair was embarrassed at the shrewdness of the observation in which there was so much more truth than this savage could possibly know. All he could do was to mumble again that it was not his custom. If the mouthpiece had been more than a mere automaton, he would have laughed at his confusion. Instead, he said evenly:

"Very well, if that is not reason enough,

the Wise One would have *Kariwa* know that that trader man sought audience this very morning and at this very platform proposed to share half the goods in the *batelão* with the Wise One and to trade the other half for gold if by chance *Kariwa* might die.

"What?"

There was shock enough in that suggestion. Blair had come fondly hoping for a disclosure, and he was getting it with a vengeance. That Pete was capable of treachery, he knew. But that his disappointment and rage should have moved him to so foul a perfidy was worse than he had suspected of him in his basest moments. Yet what could he do? Indignant he was, and angry. Furiously angry. But still, what? He could not seek that rat out and offer to fight him. He might catch him by the scruff of the neck and shake him. But what satisfaction is there, after all, in shaking a man who has just tried to sell one's life away? And what protection was there to prevent a man who had gone so far from attempting something equally treacherous again? Could he hale him before a magistrate and bind him over to keep the peace?

Blair was experiencing that helpless feeling that comes sooner or later, but comes inevitably, to all who wander in the waste places of the earth when they realize that in a savage community a man who is restricted by the inhibitions of a civilized community is very much at a disadvantage. He could do nothing but mutter again that it was not the custom of a certain class of his people to kill in cold blood or even in hot blood with malice and aforethought.

There followed a long silence, and Blair felt that he was being looked over. He wondered whether his refusal to comply with the cold-blooded suggestion of the wizard would react to his own prejudice. Then the verdict.

"The Wise One says that *Kariwa* is a man of strong resolution."

That was all. The mouthpiece rose and passed with slow deliberation into the *moloca*. Blair was left to his own thoughts and plans. With head bent on his chest he was half way back to the boat before he knew that he had no plans, that he was not even planning. His thoughts were far away, reviewing a scene the farthest possible from this one. The picture was of an office, hemmed round by all the restraints of civilization, and an irascible autocrat who wielded a rule of fear from an inner sanctum behind a glass door was telling him that he was pig-headed. He contrasted that scene with this one where a cold-blooded autocrat who wielded a rule of fear from an inner sanctum behind a grass mat told him that he was a man of strong resolution. He wondered just where was the difference. And, so far from thinking of Pete and being angry, he grinned.

When he told the River Cat of the conversation and of the shocking disclosure, the latter was not shocked at all. To him the news was perfectly normal and to be expected. He had never thought any different of that gringo. What he did seize upon was of vastly greater moment.

"Ha, then there is gold hidden somewhere. The Wise One has admitted it."

Which was a point that Blair, in his confusion, had quite overlooked. The problem remained how to get it. There remained, too, the problem of what to do about Pete. Beat him? Ignore him? Pretend that one knew nothing and watch him? Decision was difficult. But wily Pete solved the difficulty himself. Conscience made a coward of him. He must have known that Blair had been summoned to an interview, so he quickly decided that he would find it safer to stay away.

HE CAME to the boat only at times when Blair was not there. He slept, Heaven knew where, and he ate, the Lord knew where else. There was something of a mystery to it till the River Cat reported that Pete had contrived to insinuate himself into the confidence of a small group of Indians and that he must be sleeping and eating with them. How had he managed to become so friendly? That was easy. Those Indians were suddenly in possession of shiny new knives and were flaunting bead arm bands. And, by that same token, since these were a naked people without ornament except for ceremonial occasions, those Indians were a band of nine hunters from another tribe who lived up the next creek above the poison tunnel, which creek wound round behind those hills.

"Why?" was the question.

Since Pete never did anything without good and proper reason well thought out, why did he select foreign Indians to make friends with? Blair thought he had hit upon

the right solution when he told the River Cat:

"The other side of those hills you say those men live? Well, this is why he makes friends with them. The gold that these people have comes without doubt from the stream beds of those hills. Well, then, if on this side, why not on the other side too? And those men maybe have no cunning old witch-doctor who hoards it. He is wise, very, very wise is our Pete. It is in my mind that some day he will steal as much of the trade goods as those nine men can carry and he will go with them over those hills."

The River Cat grunted angrily.

"What chance will he have to steal? We are two and our crew are six more, good men and faithful. If between us we can not keep a watch we deserve that he steals."

But the River Cat was underrating the extreme cleverness of Pete. A week passed. A long week of monotony and of blank endeavor to discover some loophole through the dense wall of obstruction. The thought did come to Blair that perhaps the condition was hopeless and that it would be better to give up and to try, possibly, that other creek on the other side of the hills. But that was only a flash. After all—he grinned—he was pig-headed, wasn't he? He would stick it out.

The reward of virtue came as unexpectedly as it always does. It seemed to be a case of who could outlast the other. Blair's persistence won. The wall suddenly fell of its own accord. The plumed messenger came and announced that the Wise One himself, no less, would look upon the *Kariwa's* face.

BLAIR felt as if he were being summoned to an audience with royalty, but was very much more elated than if such had been the case. He had been sure all along that if his exclusive highness would but give him an interview he could convince him of the mutual benefit to be derived by opening up business. What kind of a fantastic personality was he going to meet, he wondered. Something of the man's character he knew already through his actions. Clever, of course, as evidenced by that supremely cunning death-trap down the creek. Implacable against traders and coldly emotionless about their elimination. Withal, the man seemed to have a certain sense of honor; otherwise, why did he not simply take the goods as well as the lives which were entirely in his power? What sort of an argument could he present before this unusual savage?

At the portcullis door of the *moloca* the messenger entered into a low conversation with the stiff guards while Blair waited, exactly as if at the anteroom of royalty.

"Hm," he thought to himself. "Arranging some sort of clap-trap to impress me."

And he steeled his mind against being surprized. The wait was interminable till, for no apparent reason, the guards stood aside and permitted the messenger to conduct Blair past them into the gloomy interior of the council *moloca*. A great empty barrack it was, except for a row of tall palm trunks down its center which supported the roof. The only light was what filtered through the interstices of the heavy matting that formed the wall. At first sight it looked to be entirely empty and barren, but as Blair's pupils adjusted themselves to the dimness, he saw that the corner at the left of the door was partitioned off with matting. A smaller portcullis in the front of this stood open.

"Let *Kariwa* enter," said the messenger.

Blair stepped in with mingled feelings of excitement and curiosity, and found himself before the presence. This cubicle was even gloomier than the outer *moloca*, but Blair could distinguish a huddled figure upon a pile of skins on a platform which corresponded with the one outside. And there, in spite of his determination not to let himself be surprized, he was. First, because there was no impressive clap-trap. Next, because the man was not at all old, as Blair had pictured him. And last, because he was no naked necromancer, smeared with paint and festooned with snake skins and finger bones. Instead, he was shapelessly wrapped in a cloak of monkey skin, so humped up and crooked that it flashed upon Blair that this man was a cripple.

His eyes, sweeping quickly from the crouched figure round the little room, saw that they were apparently alone, and then were drawn back to the extraordinary eyes that stared at him from above the huddled wrapping. Enormous eyes they were, deep sunken beneath strong brows set in a high pale forehead. The nose was thin between high, thin cheek bones, and was not the usual low bridged type; it was sharply

aquiline. Then came the most startling surprize. The face was bearded.

Suddenly Blair knew that he stood before a white man.

The deep eyes still stared at him as if trying to read his very soul. Then a thin hand appeared from beneath the cloak and beckoned and a thin, sneering voice emerged.

"Come nearer, my bold trader."

The man spoke in Portuguese, but even Blair could tell that that was not his native tongue. His own tongue was dumb. He had come prepared with a list of arguments to appeal to a savage mind, and here he was face to face with a keen white man's intellect. He did not even think of entering his customary denial against the accusation of trade. All he could say was—

"I am much surprized."

"I am not interested in your feelings," snapped the man. "Sit down."

Blair noticed a low stool hewn out of a single block of wood on the platform before him. Since that was the only available seat, he climbed up and squatted himself upon it. The man continued to glare at him. Then suddenly he shot a long finger accusingly at Blair's face.

"You make things very difficult for me, you hide-bound fool."

Blair was taken aback at the unexpected charge. He was doing nothing other than be continuously surprized ever since he stepped into the sanctum of mystery. But he thought he sensed the meaning of the man's virulence.

"You mean about, er—my partner." The word came with distaste. "Well, as a white man yourself, you understand how I feel about—"

"I am not interested in your feelings," snapped the man again, and closed thin lids over his eyes as one drops a stage curtain to close a scene.

It seemed that he was going to hold that pose indefinitely, stiffly crooked and head thrown back, like a pale death mask of one who has passed in pain. But a detail of tribal administration caused an interruption from without. A group of men arrived and stood outside the *moloca* door. Blair could hear the low tones of their conversation, but could not understand anything. The irascible dictator, with ears trained to keen hearing through his mat walls, strained to catch what was said. Blair knew better than to interrupt. Shortly another man came hurriedly and entered the *moloca*, but stood without the holy of holies. He announced something in his own tongue. The wizard's eyes blazed open and he sat upright to ask a fierce question or two. Then he gave a curt order, and the messenger departed.

The eyes closed again and the Wise One sank back to huddled silence. Presently a dull drumming commenced somewhere back of the *moloca*. The Wise One smiled as in sleep, almost chuckled. Then he awoke himself with a jerk and focussed his malevolent eyes upon Blair again. He was going to issue more orders, and he punctuated his points with stabs of his long finger.

"Now, young man, I can talk to you. First of all—" he leaned forward and glared —"who I am and why I am here is my business. Understand? Well, don't—let—yourself—ever—forget—that—for—one—minute."

Blair nodded without saying a word. A dozen swift theories were racing through his mind about the reason for this amazing person's self-incarceration in this last corner of the earth. Crime, jealousy, fear—who could guess? But this was not a time for speculation. The man was going to make some sort of confession or concession, and Blair was not going to interfere with his acrimonious whims. The man shot out his finger again.

"Why I will not have traders here is my business—" Blair could guess perhaps why —"my business and my people's. But I'm not a fool. We need trade. We have none because there's no trader who isn't a lying, treacherous dog like that clever ex-partner of yours. Now shut up and let me continue. I'm not answering questions. I'm telling you my terms."

Blair subsided. The dictator ruminated a moment before firing another string of shots.

"I haven't killed you off-hand and taken the goods you were foolhardy enough to shove into this trap because these people have a stupid custom about this single combat thing that even I can't break and because one boat-load of stuff isn't sufficient for our needs. Now, I've been watching you and making inquiries about you from your crew and—yes, and testing you. I'm not a fool. I learned that you seem to regard Indians as human beings, and I believe that you can be trusted if it's to your advantage.

While your slimy friend lived I could have made no sort of arrangement with you—"

That was more than Blair could stand. The previous hint, he thought, might have been an accident of speech. But this was direct statement.

"What do you mean, while he lived?" he demanded. "What are you hinting about? Come on out with it."

The dictator of orders peered at him quickly, sensing that he was dealing with a temper that he could not browbeat indefinitely. Then he chuckled with malicious enjoyment.

"Well, since you're so rudely insistent, my young bravo, I will tell you, and see how you like it. Your very clever partner, as you call him, as soon as you were safely out of the way here, got one of his friends from over the hill to put on some feathers and to take a message to your freak to say that I wanted to see him and your crew, too. You heard them arrive a little while ago. They're waiting outside now."

He paused to chuckle again and to enjoy the spectacle of Blair's anxiety. Then he rang in the dramatic surprize with all the skill of a stage director.

"Your trader friend, then, as soon as the freak was out of the way too, jumped your boat with his nine new chums, and they've gone with the whole trading outfit down our poison creek, —— bent for open water!"

BLAIR leaped to his feet. So that was the cause of all this vulture's chucklings! And Pete, cunning —— Pete, had succeeded at last in bringing off the coup that he had planned for so long. The princely trading outfit and a crew of nine well-bribed men were his. Blair's one thought was pursuit in the fastest canoes he could get, jammed to the gunwale with paddlemen. The twisted comedian shook in his robe as he cackled at Blair's leap to action. He held out a restraining hand.

"Sit down! Come back!" he shrilled.

"Good lord!" shouted Blair. "How can you talk about doing business when they've got away with the whole outfit of goods? I've got to get after them. Give me an order for a couple of canoes and some men."

"Sit down! Don't get excited!" panted the autocrat between spasms of mirth. "I've already ordered two canoes to get ready to go after them and bring your boat back. Sit down. There's no hurry. My men will pick them up when the mist has cleared."

Again that suggestion of mystery half understood. Blair flared right out at the exasperating dramatist.

"Confound you! Don't talk vaudeville at me! Out with what you've got, or I'll grab the first canoe on the beach and get after them with my own men."

The man waved a hand weakly to indicate the stool. Blair's anger was but adding to the humor of the occasion.

"Sit down! They can't get away. They'll be caught for certain, if they aren't in it already. You heard — heh — heh-heh — you heard the signal drum? Well—ho-ho—we—we mended that pipe line!"

Then Blair understood. His fury of action passed from him in a long, whistling exhalation. So that was the grim joke that so tickled the fancy of this theatrically minded wizard! Pete, through his own clever treachery, had furnished the means of eliminating the barrier which he himself presented to the opening up of negotiations. Dramatic justice on the villain.

Blair sat down slowly. He felt that he ought to be horrified. But once again environment asserted its dominion. In the jungle one's sensibilities could not respond with renewed horror to each new death. The shrewd grasper of his opportunities gave him no time to think. The little joke over with; he was himself again.

"Come now, young man," he said with his natural asperity. "That matter is well settled. The man was a menace. While he lived I could have made no arrangement with you. Now we can deal more freely. You are a white man. My observation credits you with being a man of sound judgment, pertinacity and courage. Otherwise I would have killed you long ago. I'm not a fool. Now, you want gold. I want goods. I will trade with you on certain terms.

Blair held his breath. Then—

"Let's hear the terms."

The dictator shot out his finger to enumerate.

"I will take everything you've got and I'll give you in exchange all the gold I've got—three hundred and seventy-four quills. It's a big price to pay for a boat-load of goods. But I'm not a fool. I know I must make it worth your while to come back."

"Not too big a price for six months of

getting here," said Blair. "But I'll take it."

"Don't argue, young man," snapped the other, and shot out his finger again.

"You will never mention to anybody what you've seen here nor give any information to anybody about this place."

Blair nodded. The finger pointed the next condition.

"I shall give you a list of what we need most—mostly hardware. You may come back, and you alone. If any trader comes with you, I'm not a fool, I shall have devised another witchcraft that won't fail."

Blair nodded again and interposed a condition of his own.

"What basis of exchange? I can't stake a boatload of goods against an indefinite number of quills."

"Young man," snarled the other, "by the time you come back my men will have washed more gold than you can buy with twice as big a boat. And I'll meet your own rate—a knife for a quill or equivalent."

"Good," said Blair. "Then I'll bring two boats."

"As long as you come alone, you can bring ten. I'll meet you," growled the capitalist. "So that's settled. Now get out and see about getting your boat back and turning over the stuff."

Blair stepped out of the cubicle and, in the gloom of the *moloca*, almost fell over the River Cat who was in the act of putting his sawed-off blow-gun away into its place at the back of his gee string.

"I thought," said he, "that maybe some precaution might be necessary against that wise old devil-devil in there. I made faces at the guards and they let me pass. I have heard all the talk that happened. But, padrão, there is a serious matter. All the goods of the *batelão* can not be delivered against three hundred and seventy-four quills.

"Huh? Why not?" Blair wondered.

"Padrão, that *ipagê* of down river who promised that you alone of the gringos would go back. We promised him a machete with a wire handle."

"Hm-mm, true," Blair agreed. "We must then forego a few quills, for a promise is a promise."

"Yes, padrao. And it is a promise that I am to be the *capitão* of your boats in all these river runnings that are to happen?"

"My promise and my desire, *amigo* Ohkohthithero of the rivers.

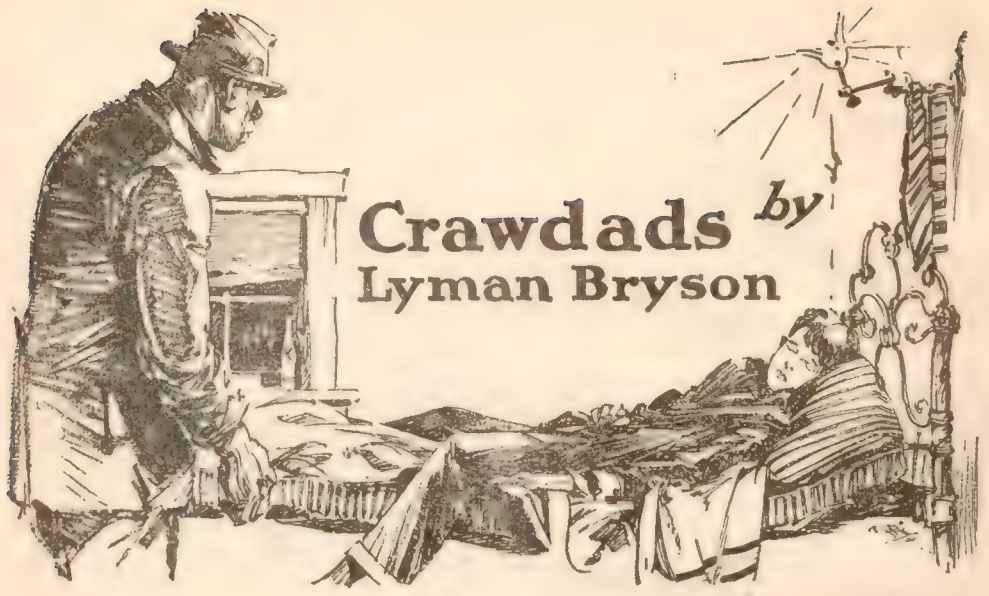
The dwarf grinned like a goblin in the dark.

"Then that was a good talk that happened," said he with simple conviction. "For those will be good days."

They passed out of the dim *moloca* into the white sunlight, and Blair knew suddenly that he was passing out of the dark days of struggle and intrigue and anxiety into the brightness of glorious life. Before his blinking eyes pictures flickered. Away in the hazy distance, upside down and distorted, hung the mirage of an office with a desk in it and a glass door from behind which an autocrat imposed his will upon other humans.

Nearer and clearer stood fate, who used to grin at him over the matter of a gamble, now sour-faced and sulky. Closer was his uncle, trying to understand with some mystification how the words which he had pronounced, "argumentative, pig-headed and lacking guts," should be translated by another very shrewd observer into "sound judgment, pertinacity and courage." By his side stood old Professor Experience, who understood it all very well indeed and smiled as he presented a diploma to his pupil. Quite close before his eyes was the last dazzling picture of all. Quills and bundles of quills that glittered in the sunlight.

Suddenly Blair was able to throw back his head and to laugh at all his pictures out of full lungs and a full heart. For the world was a wide open place in which to go up and down; and if by results he was to be judged, then three hundred and seventy-four quills of gold would weigh an awful lot in the balance.



Crawdads

by Lyman Bryson

Author of "At Dutchy's."

ABOVE the murmur of a hot night in squalid streets the cry of invitation was a mournful disturbance. "Crawda-a-a-ads! Crawda-a-a-ads!"

They used to know that cry in the Missouri River towns. Where the streets sloped off into dirtiness and poverty and evil, in summer nights that wrapped the tired inhabitants in a muggy restless heat the crayfish sellers used to go up and down with baskets of fried dainties, haggling for meager profits and singing their solicitous, unintelligible song. It is even probable that their customers awaited their coming with pleasant anticipation; crawdads were as near as they could ever get to sea-food, and even inland negroes must have fish.

For Barjee the occupation was absurd. He had a voice that swelled and reverberated in throaty pleading. The voice was an asset, and surely his mind was not above the simple difficulties of his trade. But his strength was huge, almost inhuman, a sleepy animal powerfulness. His mind was too slow to make use of strength even for the satisfaction of instinctive wants; but it was absurd for him to tote a basket of fried fish and jingle nickels in a ragged pocket.

Perhaps it was his look of heavy power that made the woman speak to him when he wandered into the fetid, smoky atmosphere of the Elbow-Up saloon. He turned at the sound of her voice and saw her looking a cool appraisal of his strength. She was tall enough to look him in the eye, but of a taut slenderness, sinuous and alert. Her skin was dark, not with the coal-black, opaque shininess of his own, but soft brown, and hot blood gave her cheeks a glow. No eyes could be more black and shadowy than those she turned on Barjee. His mouth fell open at the strangeness of her. Even her speech was amazing, clean-cut and full of consonants like a white person's.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Barjee."

His answer was scarcely loud enough to be heard above the clatter. Across the floor in a corner a piano, calloused strumpet among the daughters of music, was jangling a succession of jazz tunes. A young mulatto, whose coat was off more to show the splendid purple stripes of his shirt sleeves than to cool him, struck the keys with rhythmic vigor. Occasionally he burst forth into words, shouting some lines from the song which were too subtle perhaps for the mere tune to convey. His efforts were encouraged by admirers who bought short drinks of whisky at the bar in the next room and placed them silently at his elbow. Three or four dizzy couples were shuffling

"Crawdads," copyright, 1926, by Lyman Bryson.

over the floor in a one-step, and from the groups at the table came a continuous, horrible babble of conversation, the talk of love and bravery and riches.

Barjee's senses had never responded to much of this multiple and difficult domestic interior. In his most inspired moments he might have been able, if he had tried, to sway his body bear-like to the alluring tunes of the piano man. He knew that the whisky was good, and he had gazed somewhat wistfully at the flow of it—not to his lips. But now—the woman. He was jostled by the dancers, beat upon by the strident waves of sound, assailed by stifling, odorous heat, but he was conscious only of the strange woman.

"So your name's Barjee, is it?"

"Yassam."

He gulped and closed his mouth tentatively. His use of a respectable word showed how little he thought of her as one of his own kind.

"Sell crawdads, eh?"

"Yassam."

She brought a silver quarter from somewhere about the belt of her dark crimson blouse and held it out to him.

"No, I don't want any crawdads. I'm hiring you to sit down over there in the corner until I come back. That'll buy you a drink. I may want you to do some work for me."

"Yassam."

It would be exaggerating the sufficiently interesting truth to say that Barjee tried to think as he sat at a bare, round table in the corner. He put his basket of wares down on the floor and forgot all about it. He stared, unseeing, upon the restless crowd. The scene was familiar enough. To be sure, he had never sat at one of those sloppy tables before, because he had never considered himself a patron. He was only a business visitor, sticking his head in once or twice during the evening as he chanted his way past the door, hoping that some one in that sweating and happy little nest might be anxious for the savor of crawdads. Now he waited in a vague, delicious torpor.

He bought a drink as the result of intimidation; he did not want to be disturbed even for that. But a waiter asked him what he would have, intimating that he could have assistance in the direction of the street if he wanted nothing that cost money. When the waiter discovered that he had a quarter, two drinks, two malignant and corrosive drafts, were brought on the first trip. If a man had the price of two, then he should have two immediately, without further discussion.

The woman had gone straight across the dance floor and into the bar-room on the other side. She was hailed by two or three young negroes, sumptuously clad, and possessed for the moment of both money and courage. She noticed none of them. Her uncovered, glossy head was carried with cutting hauteur and her step was swift. No one tried to follow.

One sallow, pock-marked dandy had seen her speak to Barjee. He had not succeeded in getting even a glance for himself, and his heart was swollen with the desire to assert in some way a claim upon her. He approached the crawdad merchant with conscious insolence. His thin legs in shepherd's plaid trousers of soiled smartness were springy with wire-like muscle and his brown derby hat rested on the side of a head as hard and round as Barjee's own.

"Say, you black bum—" he sat on the edge of a chair opposite the object of his wrath— "what a' you doin' aroun' yere?"

Barjee was scarcely aware that he had been addressed. The dandy reached over and snapped at his hand with a pink-nailed forefinger.

"This yere is a place for gen'l'mun and ladies. What right you got, huh?"

He drawled a sufficient degree of insult into these words, but Barjee was for the moment above insult. He mumbled only an impatient request to be let alone.

The gorgeous one who deigned to be jealous sat working his fingers in a nervous rage, trying to think of some evil word that would carry his venom home. But he did not know any new words and, as he was about to make his attempt in worn and nasty terms, the woman, suddenly appearing beside him, put a light and scornful tap upon his shoulder.

"Get out of here, Cal. I don't need you."

He did not guess at what he was being saved from; he would have needed a few seconds of solid persuasion to teach him how little his prowess was worth against Barjee's power. He rose to protest his innocence, his devotion and his fine disdain of her choice all at once.

"Aw, honey, I ain't—"

She checked him.

"Get out, Cal. Shut up and get out. You ain't in on this."

When he hesitated, she frowned savagely. Cal, with murder in his heart, strode off to the bar, hoping nobody had seen his rejection. The woman beckoned to Barjee and he followed her out into the street, leaving his basket of crawdads on the floor.

THE siren whom he walked beside wasted no endearments. He had only an overpowering sense of good fortune. She went with purposeful speed along the concrete sidewalk and he asked no questions. The old wooden buildings of the district were open to the hot night. Laughter, ribald and mirthless, a ceaseless talking, the banging of piano that were sick to death of the tunes they played—these sounds came in intermittent waves as the two passed the windows. On one corner a grocery store was closed and dark, like a sudden oasis in the hideous activity of the lighted houses. The droning cry of another crawdad merchant, a competitor, failed to swerve Barjee's attention. He did not fall back a step in the thought of lost business.

They passed groups of men and an occasional woman, alone. Sometimes a greeting or an inquiry was addressed to them, but she hurried on, averting her face when they came close to a street lamp. She turned abruptly into an alley.

Here it was pitchy dark. She stopped and put out a hand as if she intended to touch him.

"Barjee!"

"Yassam."

"Are you as strong as you look?"

"Huh? I dunno. I sho' can try."

"But you could carry a good-sized boy?"

"Yassam. Easy."

"Well, there's a boy in a room up here. I want him carried out of there and about two blocks away. And there might be a little trouble. Not much chance of that, but it's possible. I want a man strong enough to get away with it."

Barjee could scarcely see her face. He leaned forward and she drew away.

"What's the mattah with 'im?"

"Who, the boy? Oh, he's all right. He'll be asleep. He won't know anything about it."

There was a slight chill on Barjee's spine. He caught dimly a sinister indifference in her tone. But she said:

"I need a strong man who can keep his mouth tight shut. I won't forget it either."

And this whispered promise changed the shiver in his soul to a suffocating eagerness.

"Yassam."

He followed her over the cinders and refuse of the alley, stumbling on obstacles she seemed to see in the dark. It was not in calm courage that he went. Open combat was a simple thing to face but this mysterious errand had the desperation of the unknown. However, he dared ask no more questions.

Beside a gate in a board fence she stopped and listened a moment, then went through and closed the gate behind them. Three paces across the littered little yard, and they were at the foot of a stairway, inclosed in unpainted planks and running up the outer wall of a dwelling. Up that steep, covered way it was dark and stifling hot and fearful. As Barjee walked, the stairs creaked under his feet in spite of her whispered caution to tread lightly.

The room at the top was evidently lighted, for a gleam came under the bottom of the loose door above the highest step. He glanced back over his shoulder, down the dismal cavern he had ascended while she listened again, and he felt a perspiration that was not fear, perhaps, but was certainly not altogether the effect of heat. She pushed the door open.

It was the dingy bedroom of some person to whom dirt was no trouble. The thick light of a wide-open gas jet filled every corner; and the only sound was the faint shrill singing of the gas. Barjee's eyes traveled to the bed. Flung there, one foot dragging almost to the floor, was a half-grown white boy, with his blank, unconscious face turned to the light. He had bright yellow hair and disheveled, expensive-looking clothes.

"My Gawd!" said Barjee.

"Sh-sh-sh—"

"Yassam."

But he whispered his obedience in a vehement sound that brought a deeper frown to her threatening black glance.

She walked across the room and into the hallway. Another gas jet was burning there. She turned this out before she closed the door and fumbled to make it fast. Despairing of the lock, she put a chair against it.

Barjee was looking at the boy. He was fourteen years old, perhaps. His slender

white hands, much smudged with dirt, were pathetically slack, and there were traces of tears rubbed across his cheeks. She pointed.

"We're going to get him out of here quick. Pick him up and come on."

Barjee went closer and looked down at the moist, thin face, mercilessly exposed to the glare, and blank with the empty, unnatural sleep of drugs. The breath that came through the parted lips was slow and tremulous. The big negro found his weight no burden at all, a pitiful, tender thing to carry out of danger. For the first time since they had started, his mind was partly freed from the woman's fascination.

"They ain't no ha'm goin' to come to him?" he asked in a whisper.

"No." She narrowed her black eyes into angry slits and the warm blood in her dark cheeks flooded upwards. "No, I tell you."

She had counted on nothing but obedience. The question in his dull eyes was not a challenging demand; it pleaded rather for reassurance that she was not asking him to be a party to any further cruelty to this lost child. It was rebellion easily put down, she knew, but she was vexed at delay.

"You fool, bring him along."

But Barjee's will, like the will of certain patient beasts, although easily led and seldom exercised, had to be reckoned with when it pricked up into the owner's consciousness. The woman's rage made her superbly beautiful, but he kept his stare, unmoved, waiting for an answer.

"Kidnaped."

She whispered that word in his ear from a thrilling nearness.

"Yassam." He heard her, but did not for a moment comprehend. Then he said, "Good Lawd!" in an awed voice and moved to put the boy back on the bed.

"But I want to get him out of here. I want to send him back—"

A thin, scraping squeak stopped her, and they both stood rigid with alarm. Some one had tried to push open the door. The woman sprang to the gas jet and the room went black.

"Get out of here," she whispered, "quick!"

THE chair did not hold and the hall door came open, squeaking its warning. There was a comment of surprize. The voice was unmistakably that of a negro, but in the darkness Barjee could not see who they were nor how many. At least they were not the law.

The woman pressed herself against him for a fleeting instant.

"Come on," she whispered and moved away.

Barjee, the boy in his arms, started for the stairway. But some one from the hall had moved more quickly through the darkness than he and had taken his stand at the stairway door. Barjee was glad the woman had gone first. He wanted her safely out of it.

He heard a murderous query from one side of the room to the other. Evidently these men were cautious. They were waiting for him to move. He shifted the burden of the boy's slack body into the crook of his left arm and grinned in the ominous, hot obscurity.

A man said suddenly:

"There ain't nobody yere. Light the gas."

An answer came from a third person, whose presence had not been suspected, evidently, near the bed.

"Well, the kid's gone from the bed. And the lights went out as we come up. Did anybody get out?"

The reply from the one by the stairway was grotesquely ferocious.

"Not by me."

Barjee stood silent, still grinning. There were three of them, at least, but he had the boy safely under his arm and he intended going down the stairway with him. Whatever these men were, he was certain they were not the boy's friends. This was not the sort of thing that frightened him. He betrayed his presence and his position by taking a single heavy step. The ferocious one at the stairway leaped recklessly in his direction. Barjee was tricked in his first blow by the darkness; he swung wide and almost upset himself. He felt a quick sting in his arm as a knife found a place there. But that arm had nothing to do but to carry the boy, so that was of little consequence.

Their eyes were beginning to see dim outlines.

"Did y' get 'im?" The one at the bed made an anxious inquiry.

But the answer of the man who danced like a slim ghost in front of Barjee was changed from an exultant "yeah" to a sick grunt. Barjee's fist rammed against his

chest and crashed him over. The one by the bed, rushing forward, was caught in a backward swing and sent stumbling. The third ran in from behind and, lacking a knife, put his fingers into Barjee's neck.

It would have been easy if he had put down the boy; he did not think of that. When he felt the sharp ends of brown fingers closing on his windpipe, he threw out his jaw and stiffened the muscles of his huge neck. In the meantime he fumbled with his free arm, trying to get hold of the man's body and tear him off.

The grin was gone now. There was a slightly puzzled resentment when his neck muscles began to ache under the fierce pressure of those lean fingers. He would not have suspected such strength in thin fingers. He saw that the one he had knocked aside was rising to his feet.

Piercing the darkness farther he saw something else. The woman was still there. She was pressing back, flat against the wall, watching his fight. He did not think that she might perhaps be waiting for a chance to help him. And he did not know, of course, that these men whose breath was on his face, full of obscene curses, trying to get him down, were her friends. The rift in domestic harmony, which had made her their betrayer because her own queenly demands had been slighted, would have been beyond his understanding.

Barjee tried to tear the hands away from his throat but, with only one arm in use, he could pry off only one set of fingers at a time. His left arm still upheld the boy who hung like a dead thing in the midst of the struggle. His second assailant struck him a blow in the face. Barjee gritted his teeth and took one of the hands that clutched at his breath and began to crush it on his thick fingers. Another well aimed blow at his face from the one in front of him made little difference. The man who had knifed him still lay on the floor and until they took up his discarded weapon he could ignore their blows. The fingers he held in his right hand were given another crushing squeeze. They slackened. He pulled the garoter around in front of him and struck him once methodically. The other, now the single upright survivor, dodged out of Barjee's way as he walked toward the stairs. The woman was there before him, and he followed her down.

He was panting but not tired. His left arm, however, was stiff and it pained him to shift the burden to his right. The blood on his sleeve troubled him.

"Barjee."

"Yassam."

"You're great stuff!"

She glowed with delight in his smashing strength and the punishment she had seen given to her friends. She had enjoyed those blows as much as if she had struck them herself. She walked close beside him and wanted to put an arm through his, but he was supporting the boy on his right side and the other was unpleasantly wet. She ignored his hurt, but put a warm hand up to pat him on the cheek, and chuckled softly to herself. They approached a light, and her champion paused for further orders.

"Now, I'll wait here."

She was completely hidden in the corner of a dark wall.

"You go on down the alley to the next corner. There's a man waiting there, a friend of mine—driving a hack. Put the boy in the hack and give the man this address—" she handed him a dirty slip of paper with a street number on it— "and then come back."

It seemed to Barjee that there was unmeasured, passionate suggestion in her voice.

The hackman awaited him. Barjee marched toward him, thinking not of the boy who, still like a corpse, lay slack in his arms, but of the woman at the alley corner, mysterious and wonderful. But as he passed another street light, he glanced down and wondered at the drugged sleep that still held fast the child's eyes. It had been only a few minutes since he had gathered him up in the room back there, where his hosts were probably now getting up with sincere oaths and examining their bruises. But he wondered if the boy might really be dead. He was surely breathing. Not dead, but very slight and pitiful. He was strangely delicate and fragile for a boy.

The hack driver was a white man, evidently well instructed, who received him in sinister silence. He looked utterly unworthy of any human trust. Barjee was accustomed to disreputability, but the hunched and shapeless figure of this man, with his silent acceptance of the bizarre appearance of a negro coming out of the night with a white boy under his arm, gave him doubts. Barjee had a wholesome fear of the law, but the nearest police station was only a few blocks away. Was this the sort

of driver to use for a rescue? Perhaps he'd better go on to the police station instead.

But his imagination could not compass more than one thing at a time. In the midst of his doubts came the thought of the woman waiting there in the darkness. On the very verge of heroism he paused. He slammed the cab door on the boy's fate and turned away.

The alley corner, dark and forbidding, was empty when he got there. It was certainly the place where he had left her. There was not a trace or sign of her.

The night was still desperately hot. Barjee's shoulder gave him a twinge of pain. His almost awakened imagination failed him. He cursed with stupid, slow resentment and remembered suddenly that he had left his basket of crawdads somewhere. He turned his dragging steps to the place he called home.

II

DOWN the railroad tracks, walking through a flood of morning sunlight, dazzling and beautiful, went Barjee in drowsy discomfort. It is one of the hardships of a crawdad dealer's life that he must be up late of nights to sell his catch and out again early in the morning. Just after sunrise is the time to begin fishing. Barjee's hat was pulled down over his shining nose to keep the sun out of his sleepy eyes and the soiled, blue collar of his shirt was rolled away from his glistening neck. His huge bulk swayed and lurched along the cindery path.

He left the dingy outskirts of the town. The single pair of tracks ahead, glittering and swimming in the sunlight, followed the curving base of the brush-grown bluff. On the other side, to the east, lay the flat meadows where, in vast, moiling uncertainties, flowed the Missouri. Beyond that the bluffs of the Iowa side were cool purple in the distance, although above their even skyline beat the coming day. Barjee's slow feet took him around the curve of the bluff until he was completely shut off from view of the last shacks of the town. The cindery railway was the only connection between him and humanity, and Barjee himself, with the sullen redness in his eyes and the barbaric conviction of strength in his slouching progress, seemed scarcely a thing of civilization.

The meadows on his left hand widened and were overrun with placid backwater reaches, filled with pale green willows and thin reeds. There in the shallows were other fishermen, voiceless and intent, moving their nets in and out of the water, throwing off showers of brilliant drops. Into that scene of idyllic quiet he turned abruptly. As he stepped from the cinders into the boggy path by the water's edge he came upon a friend busily patching a net.

"Hullo, Barjee."

His answer was a grunt.

"How did y' come out last night?"

"I did nuthin'," said Barjee, in smoldering resentment. "Lost m' basket and didn't make a cent."

He said nothing at all about the deep cut in his left forearm, now wrapped in a dirty cloth. That arm hung painfully straight and he did his work with the other. He was asked no further questions. The other fishermen knew him too well to expect conversation. A surly, laborious silence was his usual atmosphere. He splashed through the silver arrows of the sunlight glancing on the yellow water, pulling small, curling crayfish out of the mud and pondering the problem of evil.

He had slept a few hours; no problem could keep him from sleeping a little. But daybreak had renewed in him the questions aroused by the white boy's pallid weakness and twisted into bitterness by the strange woman's duplicity. Slowly, during the morning, as the heat shimmered around him in the trembling air, clutching dozens of slimy creatures accumulated in his baskets, he came to a conclusion. The woman had not meant to rescue the boy. And that sinister cabman was her accomplice in an evil plot within a plot. The white cabman had been a willing or at least an unconscious abettor, to her crime; just as Barjee himself had been an involuntary aid. He had served to transfer the booty from one hiding place to another. A slow, abiding anger built itself in him as he approached this conclusion. He was angry with the lying, beautiful woman and with the silent unspeakable driver who had carried away the boy. He dismissed without rancor the men who had beaten him and stabbed him in the dark. Their crimes were natural and unimportant. He wished he had seen them clearly enough to identify one of them. It might be possible to find them again and

pay the woman off on behalf of the boy.

He finished his catch and walked slowly home, back up the hot cindery tracks again, where the mid-morning sun played blinding streaks along the rails and joined them in a level pool of white fire in the distance. He stored his catch in an old barrel behind his shanty consecrated to that purpose and sat down on his doorstep to think.

As a result of his thinking he came, a few hours later, timidly to the foot of the steps which led up to a square door in the ominous, red brick front of a police station. He had never been inside it before; his steps had always quickened unconsciously when he passed its gloomy windows in his night wanderings. At the doorstep he was greeted by a wave of the horrible prison smell, the smell of disinfectants overlaid on dirt and of human animals in confinement. It staggered him and loosed his knees in fear. But he went in, holding his hat in his hand, and walked down the echoing hallway to a door beyond which he could see a man behind a desk in a little cage. He was writing in a huge book and was in shirtsleeves, although he wore a shiny badge on his vest. Before this man Barjee stood for several minutes until a question was exploded at him.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Want to see the boss."

"Captain's busy," answered the desk sergeant from force of habit. "What do you want to see him about?"

"About a boy, a white boy."

For several cold moments the man stared at Barjee in hostile contemplation. His eyes of a pale blue rested on the sweating duskiness of Barjee's face in an impersonal severity, implacable, brutally suspicious. The negro felt the steel of the law to his very marrow. But he held his ground.

The desk sergeant nodded toward a wooden bench.

"Sit down there," he commanded.

Barjee sat, his hat still in his giant hand, his head hanging forward, until a voice from an inner room rumbled:

"Hey, you! Come in here."

The captain of the station was sitting at a little old-fashioned roll-top desk in a dingy closet of an office. He was a girthy, stiff-haired Irishman whose weakening eyes twinkled with deceptive quickness behind his spectacles. He was inclined in the beginning to be jocose.

"Looking for a white boy, are you?" he asked.

"No, suh," answered Barjee.

"Oh, I thought you were. What's your name?"

"Barjee."

"Ever been in jail?"

Barjee gulped.

"No, suh."

"Well, what's this about a white boy?"

"He's kidnaped, Cap'ain, a little white boy—about fo'teen yeahs old."

The policeman's eyes dilated and into their twinkling shine came a look something like the steely contemplation that had been in the pale gaze of the one at the desk.

"Go on," he said, "what do you know about him?"

"I seen 'im. Last night, I seen 'im in a back room over dar on Twelf' Street. They took 'im away in a hack."

"Who did?"

"I dunno. Some cullud folks. A woman and some men and a white man, a hack drivah."

"How did you happen to see them?"

"I was the man what carried the boy ovah foh them."

This astonishing frankness put a different look in the captain's eyes. He pressed his advantage in the only way he knew, with a threat.

"You're one of the gang yourself, aren't you? What are you squealing for?"

Barjee shook his head.

"No, suh. Never seen 'em befo'."

The captain laughed a short, professional laugh.

"Better come clean with the whole business, nigger. Or we'll find some way to make you."

It was not the threat alone that shut Barjee's mouth. It was more a sudden realization that this was a matter more complex than he had supposed. He felt himself enmeshed. He stared at the floor. When the captain threatened him again with specific mention of a lock-up, he tried only once to protest.

"No, suh, Cap'ain. I nevah seen 'em befo'."

It was no use. More information than he had was demanded of him on pain of immediate punishment. He resigned himself to malignant destiny.

The captain signed to a policeman, who led Barjee down a cell-lined hall.

HE WENT behind a metallic, banging door into the cell-block half an hour later. The captain tipped off a reporter who strolled into his office that they were on the trail of the gang which had stolen the little Seeton boy and was holding him for ransom. The news was betrayed to the public, although Barjee's name and color and circumstance were shrouded in necessary secrecy. The method he was best able to withstand, the method of chilly brutality, was used on him in vain. He did, finally, give a description of the room out of which the quarry had been taken with sufficient exactness to convince the police that he knew the whole story. His description of the woman as "like a white woman," was dismissed as deliberate mystification. There was no mystery in the captain's mind. He knew that Barjee was squealing on his gang because of some internecine quarrel and now, when he saw what he was getting into, he was trying to lie out of it. Under pressure, Barjee sat stolidly and waited.

It increased Captain Moran's annoyance that Mrs. Seeton, the boy's mother, insisted upon knowing exactly what was going on. He resisted for several days her demand that she herself be allowed to question the suspected prisoner. But he had to give in.

Barjee was led into the office, untouched by prison hardships except for the weird wrinkles in his ragged clothes. If there was any other effect upon him of nights made sleepless by vigilant guards, of skilfully planned threats and tricky questions, of the fearful uncertainties that wrapped his existence, he gave no sign. But he looked capable of anything stupidly base and horrible.

He raised his eyes only once. He did not notice the other people, but he caught a disquieting vision of a tearful, overwrought woman's face and two small, white hands which twisted in her lap.

"Go ahead, ma'am," said the captain. "Ask him."

She twisted her hands and stared at the bent head of the negro. His blackness, his bulk, his silence terrified her. She cleared her throat twice and tried to speak. Then she stood up and took a courageous step toward him.

"Do you know where my boy is?" she asked.

Slowly Barjee shook his head.

"You see," said the captain insolently, "I told you he wouldn't talk."

The mother was not so easily convinced.

"You did see him, though, didn't you?"

"Yassam," answered Barjee huskily. "Leastwise, I seen a little white boy."

She broke forth in an entreaty, in a voice that tore like a sob through her breast.

"Tell me where he is—tell me. Can't you see how I'm suffering for him? We'll give you anything—anything in the world. Do you want money? We've offered money. We'll give everything we have—everything. Tell me where he is! I promise that nothing will happen to you."

Barjee only shook his head sorrowfully from side to side, like an animal. The woman sank back into her chair and a man who was beside her reached over and took her hand gently. But as Barjee was being led out he looked up again and blinked.

"Mebbe—" he began.

Her tear-blinded eyes were on him. He rolled his own toward her so that the brownish white globes of his eyeballs made a dull sign of expression in his impassive black face.

"Maybe what?" she whispered.

"Mebbe—if they'd let me out o' yere—mebbe—I could find 'im."

The mother turned toward the captain; he laughed and waved a hand for the prisoner to be withdrawn.

But the Seeton family had power over the captain's head, the sort of power which makes police administration difficult. Next morning Barjee found himself at the door of the cell-block, free except for a promise to report there every day until further commands.

He went to his shack, borrowed a basket load from a friend and was out again in the night, calling through the hot, dark streets—

"Crawda-a-a-ds, crawda-a-a-ads!"

III

BRAZENLY fearless, the woman was there again in the Elbow-Up saloon, scattering her careless seductions. Not the least tremor of recognition showed in her face when he lurched across the dance floor toward her, his basket of crawdads on his left arm, his hat in his right hand. On his face was an expression of respectful solicitude. He was not "lookin' for trouble with her." He had

not stopped to consider whether he was now proof against her deceits. He was thinking with solid single-mindedness of the lost boy.

"Please, ma'am," he began.

When she turned her back on him with fine disdain, he touched her sleeve gently with a bear-like paw. It happened that the tall, thin negro in shepherd's plaid trousers and the brown, hard hat was in the group on which she smiled. He remembered the crawdad merchant. It was under his enthusiastic leadership that ten or twelve of the lady's friends threw Barjee out of the Elbow-Up into the street. He made very little resistance. There might come an occasion on which he would be willing to engage the whole clientele of the Elbow-Up but, being denied access to the mysterious and forgetful woman, he had no interest in remaining there. He picked up his hat and sat down on the curbstone to think. A moment later the door of the saloon opened and he saw his basket, scattering fried crawdads, come sailing through the light of the doorway into the street. He picked it up and dusted off a few of the dainties and replaced them. He sat on the curb and waited.

When, long afterward, the woman in the crimson blouse emerged from that same door, she was alone. She appeared not to notice Barjee sitting there, ruminating like an ox. Barjee rose and followed her. She was amazingly bold. It astonished even him that she should turn into the same cinder alleyway, through the same gate and up that cavernous, stifling, covered stairway as if nothing had ever happened there.

The door above slammed as he reached the foot of the stairs. Through the darkness he clambered upward, and the whole building seemed to groan and creak beneath his step. It was only their excited colloquy in four voices together which prevented the people in the gas-lighted bedroom from hearing his approach He waited a moment, looking down at his feet, where the light shot out under the rickety door. There was unbridled gaiety inside; he could hear her voice, throaty, self-possessed, full of superb sensuousness, and also the staccato clatter of masculine tones in higher pitch. The door yielded to his push.

The woman was standing nearest him. Two men were tilting back against the wall in straight wooden chairs. A third lay supine on the bed with one knee drawn up and his other leg thrown across it so that a large yellow shoe was upheld in the air and wagged slackly with his laughter. When the voices of the others stopped abruptly, this man on the bed, looking from his recumbent comfort and seeing Barjee, rolled over and sat upright with his mouth wide open.

The woman spoke first, smoothly and decisively—

"You're in wrong, nigger."

"Yassam," acknowledged Barjee with patient respect. "Mebbe—could I have a wo'd with you-all, ma'am?"

"Get out. Beat it!" she answered with just the hint of impatience that betrayed fear.

Two of the men, rising warily from their chairs, advanced toward him.

"What you-all done with that white boy?" asked Barjee simply, inviting murder in a gentle, mournful respectfulness.

He had not wondered how it could be that the woman was meeting friends again in this room, perhaps the same friends whom she had robbed of their quarry. These three men, now crouching around him, were in fact the three he had helped her to cheat. But she had long since convinced them that the hulking giant who ran away with the boy that night had been no ally of hers. It was part of her game to make them think that she, as well as they, had lost track of him that night after the fight in the darkness. They had suspected her, of course, but she could make them believe, in spite of natural suspicions, that she had kept their thief's honor. And she shared their revels to hold them in that error. They were gay because they had something to drink and gaiety was their habit.

But they might recollect in a moment and might see that this apparition in the doorway, stupid, respectful, formidable, was much like the one who had worsted them all that disastrous night. His question froze them in threatening attitudes.

"What boy?" asked the woman, narrowing her eyes.

"That little white boy what I took down f'om yere fo' you."

A second time the woman had need to manage Barjee. She needed to get him out of that place swiftly and quietly before her companions made further inquiries. She could probably have had him murdered there at her feet by using the proper

epithets and the right speed of denunciation, hurrying the others into revenge before they had time to think. But she feared Barjee's power. He might be able to resist, and would speak again.

She had one weapon in whose use she was adept. Darkness. The gas light went out with a startling *pop*. Barjee felt himself being pushed, by her hands, into the stairway's inky pit. He felt her press herself against him and hold him close to the wall. He heard the other three negroes pass him in the darkness, hot on his trail.

AFTER ten minutes of dodging through dirty alleys he was in another squalid room whither the woman had led him, and he wasted no effort trying to understand how she had contrived their escape. They faced each other.

"What did you want to do that for?" she demanded. "You've spoiled the whole business now."

Barjee's gaze was solemn and noncommittal. He knew she was using all her arts to deceive him again; he was aware of the rich warmth of her skin and the grace of her body. Her eyes burned with command and promise.

He held with simple obstinacy to his point.

"Want to find that 'ere white boy," he explained, as if she might have misunderstood him.

If the woman had a shrewd suspicion that her game was up, it was largely because she felt the immovable, stupid solidity of Barjee's soul. But she did not resign without an imperious final demand, her rights to his obedience.

She walked toward him with a swinging step. She scorned the appeal of weakness. In that she misjudged him. She stood close to him as he drew back and breathed in his face.

Barjee's pulses drummed. He swallowed and shut his eyes. A dizzy shudder went through him, and he felt that he was being swept away in a wave of hot mist.

"Huh, Barjee?" she whispered, recalling his name. "You and me are in this together again. Huh, Barjee," she whispered, purring like a cat.

He kept his eyes closed.

"Got to get that boy back to his folks," he muttered.

If he could have seen the look she gave him then, he might have been afraid for the first time. But he stood, blind and like a heap of unresponsive earth.

She jerked away. She had a new idea and she saw a way out.

"Look here," she began in a matter-of-fact tone. "There's a big reward for that boy, a big reward and no questions asked."

He blinked and listened.

The reward was large, although it was less than the ransom which had been demanded in a horrible missive penciled on scratch paper which the mother, because of the interference of the police, had never obeyed. The woman went on:

"There ain't any use in taking him back unless you get that reward, is there? Well, you and me are going to get it. Do you see? We're going to get it and split it—fifty-fifty."

"Huh?" said Barjee doubtfully. "Jus' as long as we get 'im back."

Very patiently and clearly she pointed out to him that he had best not be the one who took the boy to the police station. He was already suspected, wasn't he? And he had already been in the grip of the law for obscure reasons. If he came back with the boy, they would think their suspicions well founded. They would refuse him the reward, and he would only be in worse trouble than before. On the other hand, if a stranger, a lady, appeared and claimed the reward, Barjee and herself would get their hands on the money and share it happily, fifty-fifty.

Barjee struggled with speech.

"Jus' as long as that boy gets back to his folks," was the only comment he could make on her artful suggestions. But he finally imposed a condition. "I want to see 'im go into that front doo' of that law house," he declared.

The woman laughed. It was too simple.

That same night, an hour afterward, he stood, a solemn and unconsciously forbidding black shadow, at the street corner near the police station. He saw a wan, sick, half-starved boy led up the steps by the generous woman. Her promises were singing very faintly in his heart; he was intent on the spectacle of restoration.

Minutes passed. He watched the grim lights of the old brick building with tireless patience. An hour. He saw a closed motor slide recklessly around a corner of the

empty street. A veiled woman leaped out and ran into the station.

His imagination was not giving him as good service as he wanted. He tried to think of what was going on inside the dingy threatening law house, what wild greetings, what stifling embraces, what sobs of hysterical happiness. But the pictures were not clear. They demanded too great an effort. He fell back on what was more recent in his memory, the alluring grace of the woman. He could see her, in fancy, leaning toward him, speaking her clear-cut, white woman's speech, warming his blood with the glow of her eyes, promising, promising—

He saw the boy and his mother come down the steps and climb into the motor. Her arms were supporting him and she was touching her face with her handkerchief, crying, with the catch of a laugh between her sighs.

Another hour passed. No one else came.

The police station was sunk again into watchful, dangerous silence. In half an hour more he remembered that there was a side door through which the woman might have gone away, mysteriously charming, richer by many dollars of a reward given and no questions asked.

Then suddenly, in the darkness, Barjee smiled. He had acquired a knowledge of the world. He knew she would never come. But he smiled. Something that stirred in him was satisfied.

He shifted his basket of wilted fish on his arm, the basket he had not forgotten to hold to this time and, although the streets were empty of possible customers, he sang out his quavering, optimistic cry:

"Crawda-a-ads, Crawda-a-a-ads! Nice, fresh crawda-a-a-ads!"

CAJUN JUSTICES

by **Nevil Henshaw**

THE old cajun justices of Southwestern Louisiana were important personages. To the folk of the remote districts, who knew nothing of the higher courts, they represented the full majesty of the law.

The trials, which were held at the justices' homes, were made all-day affairs, the neighbors driving in from miles around. Evidence was taken interminably, although the verdict was usually based upon the justice's point of view rather than upon any mere point of law.

For example, I know of a planter who brought suit against one of his tenants for the recovery of a calf. His ownership being proved, he was awarded possession of the animal. Next he was ordered to pay the costs of the court.

"But," objected the planter, "I have won my case. The loser should pay."

"True," agreed the justice. "But then, m'sieu, you have the money, whereas the other has not."

However, it was in domestic matters that these "prairie judges" really shone. One of them declared proudly that he could marry and divorce quicker than any other man in the state.

"It is quite simple," said he. "Gabbie wishes to tie up with some girl. That is all right. He gives me five dollars, and I write down his marriage in my book.

"After a while he don't like it? He wants to be free? That is all right again. For ten dollars more I tear out the page."

Jacques Coeur—

The Goodly Company of Adventurers

by Post Sargent

Author of "Plato," "The Admirable Crichton," etc.

SELF-MADE man! A touch-stone expression of Anglo-Saxon speech. It connotes volumes, illumes character, conjures up images of toil and thought and achievement, before which mere definition confesses itself helpless.

Artisan de sa fortune, the French counterpart, is as fully descriptive. Such a mechanic of his own fortune was Jacques Coeur who, had he been born English, would have rejoiced in the uneuphonious and plebeian name of James Heart. Lacking in elegance, perhaps, but not in the promise of courage and high deeds.

Meld Morgan with Rockefeller. Raise to the third power, multiplying by the wealth of a Henry Ford. Having piled this Ossa of riches on this Pelion of power, consider yourself in the presence of Jacques Coeur, the baron of industry, the patriot and philanthropist of the Middle Ages—Midas, Plutus and Mæcenas.

Consider next his environment. In an age *sans* wireless, steam, telegraph; *sans* railroad, automobile or swift aeroplane in an age when speed and progress were measured by the tortoise's pace, Jacques Coeur conquered the almost insuperable obstacles of distance and delay. First among Frenchmen, he linked the Levant to the Occident and forced the distant East to pour its camel-loads of riches into the lap of the wealth-hungry West.

When English, Burgundians and traitorous nobles plotted together or singly for the final ruin of Charles VI, poor mad King of France, his son, the Dauphin—Charles VII to be, named the "Well-Served," if not the Well-Deserving—found in his hour of need three friends and saviors. Agnes Sorel, patriot, wise counsellor and mistress; Joan of Arc, the "Maid of Orleans," patriot and inspired captain of armies; Jacques Coeur, patriot, wealth-giver, redeemer of France in a time of financial chaos. But for these three the English would have succeeded, the traitors within would have wrecked their country and Charles would never have been anointed and crowned at Rheims in 1429.

And the gratitude of Charles VII? Agnes Sorel was undoubtedly mourned at her death. Joan of Arc was burned by the English at Rouen in 1431 without Charles raising a hand to save her. Jacques Coeur survived the king's peculiar display of gratitude, thanks to his own wits and the loyalty of his servants and retainers.

Shortly after the opening of the fifteenth century, the little town of Bourges in central France buzzed with mysterious rumors concerning the sudden wealth of one of its

citizens. Nicolas Flamel, the great alchemist, it was said, had instructed the youthful Jacques Coeur in the art of making gold. The latter had, in turn, taught the secret to his merchant father. In this way their fortunes had been made, which they concealed, "feigning to have prospered in commerce." But the secret was out. A certain red stone endowed with the properties of transmuting base metals into gold and of prolonging life had come into their hands as the result of black magic.

Whatever the explanation, magic or mercantile genius, there is no doubt that Jacques Coeur had soon acquired a very large fortune and was a merchant of great importance. Yet this was merely the start of his career, his wealth, the modest foundations of vast opulence.

Having now attained in France the prosperity he sought, it became his great and patriotic object to elevate the commerce of France which had fallen low. French ports were empty of vessels, for Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Florence and Barcelona had monopolized all the commerce of the Mediterranean. Jacques Coeur changed all this by his genuis and energy.

Soon his name and probity were bywords in far distant lands. In the course of twenty years Jacques Coeur had more commercial power and greater personal wealth than all the merchants and trading companies of the Mediterranean put together. A thousand agents, carefully chosen for their honesty and ability, represented him at different ports of Europe, Egypt and the Orient.

Everywhere his ships were respected, as if he had been a sovereign prince. Wherever commerce was to be cultivated, his vessels were to be found. From farthest Asia they brought back silks, furs, spices, cloths of gold and silk, ingots of gold and silver that constantly swelled his mighty store, until all Europe was filled with the tale of his adventurous daring. Like his famous prototype, Cosimo de Medici, who from a simple merchant became a supreme ruler, so Jacques Coeur, merchant of Bourges, became illustrious and Midas-rich—admired, feared, envied, hated, but courted by all.

To Bourges came Charles, Dauphin of France. Outcast from the court of his mad father, the king, and of his mother, evil and infamous, he sought refuge from intrigue and help in dire poverty. In the city and estates of Jacques Coeur he found the first; the mighty fortune of the merchant-prince became his for the asking.

Guided and propelled by the wisdom, patriotism and tireless energy of Jacques, Charles chased the English from France, subdued the Burgundians, drove intrigue and traitors from the court—for a time. To his sobriquet, "The Well-Served," he added the title, "The Victorious." The truly victorious were the Maid of Domrémy, the merchant of Bourges and the mistress of France's king.

What was the reward of Jacques Coeur's whole-hearted devotion? Greatly honored at first, made *argentier*, or treasurer, of a bankrupt France, he revised her currency, built up her commerce and finances and credit, consecrating to the task his own incalculable wealth.

France was saved, but Jacques Coeur was ruined. Jealousy, envy, hatred—all the evil passions ever aroused by integrity and loyalty and success—were let loose upon him. Being honest, he had no defense. Contrary to accepted opinion, honesty is not its own best advocate. Jacques Coeur became the victim of his great qualities.

JOAN OF ARC had suffered the penalty of her love of country in 1431. Agnes Sorel had died untimely in 1450, uncommonly faithful and inspiring to the last. And now Jacques Coeur, in 1451, peaceful merchant and statesman that he was, was to adventure with them into the "Land of Benefits Forgot." *

Charles, by the grace of God King of France, to all by whom these present letters shall be seen, greeting.—As, after the decease of the late Agnes Sorel, demoiselle, the common report was that she was poisoned; and by the same common report, suspicion was entertained of Jacques Coeur, then our counsellor and *argentier*, and also that he had sent armor to the Saracens, our ancient enemies, and enemies of the Christian faith; . . . and of having transported to the said Saracens great quantities of silver, so that it was said that our whole province of Languedoc was emptied of its treasure . . .

Also, he is accused of having taken on his own account several men whom he called ruffians and thieves, and caused them to work in his galleys . . .

Also, Jacques Coeur is accused of turning to his

*Almost every one takes pleasure in repaying trifling obligations; very many feel gratitude for those that are moderate; but there is scarcely any one who is not ungrateful for those that are weighty.—*La Rouchefoucauld.*

own profit certain farms and fairs in Languedoc, instead of rendering to us the profits of the same . . .

Also, that having deceived us and obtained large quantities of our revenues, the said Jacques Coeur has affected to supply us with loans of his own money . . .

By the advice, and after the deliberations of our said Grand Council, we did order and appoint that Jacques Coeur should be arrested, his goods put into our hands by inventory, and in the guardianship of certain commissioners.

When Jacques Coeur was tried upon this indictment, all these charges fell to the ground. A noble lady, one of his accusers, confessed to perjury. Others fled when their villainy was discovered. Jacques Coeur was revealed to be the victim of a gigantic conspiracy of envious courtiers, jealous business rivals, embezzlers of state money, rogues sent to the galleys by Jacques for treason or banditry.

Charles VII seemed to awake to the injustice of his own conduct and to feel for a moment remorse for his ingratitude. But intrigue in the end conquered his supineness. Jacques Coeur was manifestly innocent; as manifestly a martyr of his loyalty to king and country.

For eleven months, Coeur had languished in prison. No shred of evidence had been found against him. All Christendom and many "infidel" monarchs protested against the persecution of such an upright man. Fatigued and exasperated with his firmness, forced to find him guilty or to be convicted themselves, his judges ordered that he should be put to the question. Rack and wheel were used in vain to extort from him a confession of his guilt.

Tortures! For the man who had created the maritime commerce of France; who had restored her king to his throne and driven hitherto victorious strangers from her shores; whose wealth had upbuilt the dignity of almost every family in the country!

Innocent, his vast estates were confiscated. King and judges and state's attorney had the lion's share of the spoils.

Taken from prison to prison in the course of two years, Jacques Coeur finally arrived at the fortified dungeon of the town of Poitiers. Thence transferred to Beaucaire, to the custody of a convent of monks, with ever a military guard having orders to kill at the slightest attempt to escape. At Paris certain lords of the kingdom, traitors and perjurers, would sleep the better, knowing that Jacques Coeur was dead.

Immured in the gloomy walls of the monastery of Cordeliers, treated kindly by the monks, but under constant surveillance day and night by armed guards, Jacques Coeur was not altogether forgotten. Three years had passed since his arrest. His property was confiscated, his wife dead and his family in exile. Only the memory of his great riches remained among the common people; the undimmed prestige of his genius and integrity among the upright of France and the merchants of foreign lands.

But in the days of success he had builded better than he knew in the affections and loyalty of his servants. Of the hundreds of factors and agents who owed their own fortunes to him, only two had turned traitor in his hour of trouble. He little knew that now one, now another, now a half dozen together, of these same factors, had prowled of a night about his dungeon, seeking vainly a way to bring about his release. But the walls were too thick, the guards too numerous, the hazards too great.

But now his need became pressing. For the consciences, or fears, of his enemies became active. The news came to the ears of Jacques Coeur that death was on its way from Paris. A letter went out from his cell, carried by a courageous Cordelier, to Jean de Village, nephew and most trusted of his factors. A pathetic document, this cry for help that dates back five hundred years!

John, my good nephew, dear son, as you love me and my life is dear to you, I recommend myself to your diligence. In God's mercy, dear son, delay no longer in coming to fetch me from this pass, being that within five days they will take me forth to put me to death, or will kill me within the walls. Already have they essayed my death by violence, a ruffian having come upon me in the middle of the night who would assuredly have killed me had it not been for a shirt of mail given me by the good friar Hugault. And having failed in this, they have secretly offered me poison powder in a goblet of wine at supper, of which I being apprised in time by said good friar, feigned to drink it, and since which have shammed a langorous sickness. Within five days I must die an the poison fail them, since others hasten to assure my death.

Your poor good master and father, J. C.

The days and nights passed, but no word arrived from Jean de Village. Imagine the anxiety of Jacques Coeur as the conviction grew in his mind that he was utterly deserted by his trusted friends. That somewhere among the servants or the guards about the monastery a poisoner and cutthroat secretly watched his victim for signs

of dissolution. That somewhere on the highroad that led from Paris to Beaucaire a band of assassins were riding post-haste with orders to violate sanctuary, to slay one held a ward of God and Church. Hourly they drew nearer; hourly the hope of succor faded.

AT LENGTH a message came from Jean de Village. Offering encouragement, it brought little hope or good cheer to the prisoner. The peril was now too imminent; the time was too short; rescuer and means of rescue too feeble.

The river Rhone separates the town of Beaucaire from the village of Tarascon, dividing the ancient kingdom of France from the domain of the Count of Provence. The Rhone was swollen with recent rains; its flood waters seemingly barred access to the monastery from that direction.

But Jean de Village had not been inactive, though the difficulties seemed insuperable. Far down the Rhone, in the busy port of Marseilles, a meeting had been held some days before of a score of conspirators, factors all of Jacques Coeur in his days of good fortune. To the call of Jean de Village had hastened Guillaume Gimart and Gaillardet, natives of Jacques' own town of Bourges. By ones and twos there drifted in old factors from Marseilles, Lyons, from ports of southern France, of western Italy, of eastern Spain. Some twenty old servants and friends, thrice armed with swords and loyalty and the justice of their cause.

Night came. A little bark had climbed the Rhone that day and anchored off Tarascon. Somewhere in the dark, still town a watchman's voice called the hour of ten, then of eleven. Silently the boat put out across the flooded river. On the shore beneath the walls of Beaucaire twenty men crept out upon the shingle.

With jingling spurs, with breaks of song or oaths, with the clatter of horses' hoofs, a band of cutthroats swept nearer and nearer on the road that led from Paris.

Toward midnight the twenty factors were beneath the city walls at the spot chosen for entering. With sentinels posted at the towers and soldiers in the barracks, direct assault would have been useless.

But one of the factors, a former native of Beaucaire, knew of a small opening in the ramparts that had been imperfectly patched. This they managed to enlarge, working in relays and most stealthily; removing the detritus so quietly that no sound of their labors reached the ears of the nearest sentinel.

Finally the breach was made. It was the hour before dawn. One by one the twenty loyal factors crawled through the little opening. It was the moment of matins. The windows of the church of the Cordeliers were faintly lighted. Thither the gallant twenty made their way.

Within, Jacques was kneeling in prayer, having arisen thus early to make his peace with God on what he expected would be his last day on earth. Even in prayer, says an old chronicler, he was *gardé à vue*—spied upon by his zealous guards.

A noise takes him from his prayer. He glances around. A cloaked figure has stolen into church and is kneeling behind him. A whisper. A beckoning finger. Jacques Coeur recognizes Jean de Village. With beating heart he rises and starts to follow the cloaked figure to the door.

A guard starts up from some dark corner as Jacques Coeur reaches the door. The stranger throws off his cloak revealing the bare sword in his hand. Its mate is thrust into the hand of Jacques Coeur.

Jean de Village engages the guard. The latter, fearing the odds against him, calls to his mates. The rush of many feet, the clash of naked swords, Jacques Coeur and his nephew are in an instant encircled by a wall of steel. Only the narrow confines of the church portico save them from immediate death.

Their danger lasts for a moment only. Silently, swiftly, irresistibly nineteen resolute men charge from different points of the shadows into the circle of soldiers. For a bit there is a surge, a whirl and eddy. The commotion subsides. Many bodies strew the ground. A dozen soldiers are dead or wounded; the rest flee.*

Jacques Coeur and his friends reach the breach in the ramparts. At this moment the rapid beat of horses' hoofs rises above the barrack-din and the querulous tones of good citizens inquiring anxiously from upper windows. Followed by a violent hammering on the city gates.

"Open to the king! *De par le roi* On the king's service!"

*Invitisque eis qui custodiae suae preerant, ac eis invasis, atrociterque et lethaliter vulneratis.—From a contemporary account.

The carriers of death had arrived. But just too late! Factors and master had passed through the opening in the walls and were hastening to their boat. A moment more and the bark swung into the current of the Rhone.

None too soon! Out of the opened gates poured the pack of angry soldiery. In the graying dawn they lined the shore, threatening and cursing in helpless fury.

Back in the church, the Cordeliers resumed their interrupted worship, adding perhaps a *pax vobiscum*, addressed to one unnamed, but carrying away their respect and affection.

Now out of the jurisdiction of Charles "The Victorious," the devoted factors hurried Jacques Coeur to the little port of Tour de Bouc in Provence; thence to Marseilles, to Nice, to Rome. Received most cordially by the Pope, Jacques might well have settled down in Rome to a ripe and peaceful old age. His interests had by no means been neglected. Notwithstanding the confiscation of his vast wealth in France, his foreign resources were far from exhausted. Jean de Village had seen to that.

But the western world, led by the Pope, was just then intent on wresting Constantinople from the Turks. Thither sailed Jacques Coeur, as a faithful son of the Church, beginning in old age a new career as a captain-general of a ship of the fleet. And thus he sails from authentic history into the golden nimbus of legend. He died. That is all that men know with certainty of his further history. Just as the good people of Bourges had credited him in the beginning with the possession of the magic red stone of Nicolas Flamel, so now oral tradition set his apotheosis in some dream-country of the East—his halo made of gold and precious stones.

Some few of the world's wise men have better understood the nature of his crown.

A BULL FIGHT

by Leonard H. Nason

IN ONE of the tiny villages of the Basque country of France a very strange festival is held twice a year, on the last Thursday and Monday before Lent. This festival takes the form of a bull fight. There are from five to six bulls—young, active, ferocious bulls. The entire population of the town and the farmers for miles around line the streets, men and women, girls and boys, and the bull is released.

Any one that has the courage can attack the bull. The bull attacks whom he pleases. This is the theory, but what actually happens is the minute the bull is shoved into the street, after having been fed malt soaked in cognac, he streaks for the first person he sees, and the rest of the populace hunt a tree, a doorway, or a window.

The great stunt of the young bloods is to wave a coat in the bull's face and then swing out of reach on a tree limb or awning support. Another great diversion is to wait until the last possible second, then bolt into a doorway and slam the door against the bull's horns. Sometimes the door does not latch, and the bull enters. If the door happens to be that into a café the destruction is great. This amuses the townspeople if not the proprietor of the café. Quite frequently too many people try to get in the same door, and while they shove and push the bull arrives and does a little shoving on his own hook. Happily his horns are covered with leather, but he can give a nasty knock with them. When one bull is tired, he is herded back to the stable and another is brought out.

This affair, that takes place nowhere else in the world, is a religious ceremony. The bull represents the spirit of evil, that rages about doing all the damage he can, and the destruction of which is every honest man's duty. However, as in real life, every honest man's first thought is for his own skin, and the spirit of evil is allowed to run rampant until he is tired.

Mirage of Madness

by Jack Rendel

Author of "Seeing It Thru."

THEY had found that valley, hung in the high woods of Carupanyo. The story which the Warrahoon had poured out at Carée's feet, that night on the sand-key, had been true. The jewels were there, and the clinking weight of those little bags was their main sustenance on the march back to the Caribbean.

It is a secret country, that, where the Venezuelan cordillera begins to break toward the *llaños* which stretch illimitably away like a green sea. For two hundred miles the mountains rise, ridge after ridge, five—seven thousand feet in the air, smothered to their very tops in the tide of the jungle. A land that is still as God made it, roamed only by the beasts and a few tribes of naked, kitten-faced Indians. A place left blank on the maps.

And hidden in it, under a bald peak, a valley where a waterfall eats away the friable rock, and washes down tiny pebbles which shine bluely when one turns them to the sun.

They had found it, mostly by extraordinary luck. Now they wondered if the luck would hold until they gained the coast once more. There were times when it seemed as if the very hand of the wilderness were upon them; as if the land were reluctant to have its secrets torn out and given to men. Down, up, only to face the same once more. A perpetual wrestle with an untrodden maze. Now and then the forest broke and gave a view. Mountains blue with distance; mountains painted scarlet by blossoming, flamboyant trees. Slopes of cascading gold; or of purple, where the wild figs had strangled their tree hosts.

But mostly they moved in a green gloom. Trees—trees—trees, until they hated them. A silent march, day after day, with the specter of hunger perpetually pressing. They kept close together, Carée always in the lead. To Davis the sight of Carée's back, its muscles straining under the weight of his pack, had become more precious than even the bags they carried. It was his sole human link in that green, shadowed wilderness. If he lost sight of it an instant, he would break into a sweating dog-trot until he caught up again. And as often as not he would find Carée waiting for him, looking back with a half grin of understanding.

"All right, fella; I ain't going to lose you—I took you in and I'll bring you out."

Davis was breaking. He knew that. Nights, when they camped on a sand bank by some unnamed river, he would say to himself—

"I must sleep."

He couldn't go on without sleep. Then he would fling himself desperately down

until aching muscles and the pounding of his blood brought him up again. There were times when he hated Carée, stretched lengthily in complete relax. The fellow was so inhumanly cool. He seemed to have no feelings at all. Sometimes he would wake and pass his hands along Davis' back until the tension gave way to drowsiness. But that meant nothing, Davis told himself fiercely, except that Carée wanted somebody to help carry the supplies until they were out of it all.

And when they reached the coast—Davis always stopped at that point, leaving the half asked question without answer. He would be of no more use to Carée then—except to share the sapphires. Anything could be done down in that hidden place where they had left the launch—Roseaux canes, dark against a moon, and only some wading heron for witness of what might take place. And after all, what did he know of Carée?

IT WAS in Trinidad that they had met. Like two corks afloat on the sea, they had been thrown together by some eddy of chance—both derelicts of the war, torn up by its stress and cast adrift.

After that year of discipline, excitement, and the constant thought of what he might have to face, Davis had found life in a Chicago office impossible. He had let go and drifted, always southward, as the way of drifters is. Probably, he was following some dream only half known to himself. Possibly the beat of some other unheard dream was throbbing in his veins. But the way of the dreamer is apt to he hard, and it was a battered-looking young man who dragged himself into a Port of Spain bar-room that day.

He knew it all so wearily well by now. These West Indian waterfronts were all alike. Streets of Spanish-looking arches, littered with refuse, negroes and great black carrion crows. Coconuts hanging languid fronds above blotched walls. Englishmen, walking in pallid, starched superiority. Bar-rooms faintly reeking behind green-slatted shutters, offering fake coolness and a foolish paradise of visions to be followed by bitter awakening.

A regular, Port of Spain bar-room, with a furtive Frenchman wiping the zinc-topped tables and holding out concave ears for what he might hear. A drone of flies against the ceiling, ice tinkling coolly in tall glasses. The usual, fusty place, with the usual atmosphere of false good-fellowship and tendency to sudden quarrel.

The important thing was that Carée had been there. Davis had noticed him the instant he entered. A long figure, sprawled at a table, clad in remains of Naval white ducks. A thin face, deeply bronzed. A mouth which held the double secret of a slow grin and a stream of soft, Mississippi speech.

He had been in the Navy during the war, he said. Now he had some sort of a motor launch in which he had come down along the islands from Florida. From Key West to Cuba, he said; then Porto Rico and St. Thomas, and from there to little, lonely islands, Anguilla, Sombrero and Saba, where no one ever goes. And here he was, doing local packet work on the muddy waters of the Gulf of Paria.

In that bar-room backwater the two human corks were caught and held by the magnetic current of a mutual loneliness. They talked as the sun slid westward and the great mass of Carupanyo, on the mainland, turned copper, with little pink clouds hanging halfway up its tremendous slopes. As he looked at it, Carée's eyes turned gray between narrowed lids. Later on, when the moon silvered the mists above the Caronée swamps, he spoke.

"You say you been looking for a job? It's no use working, fella; especially for a white man in a nigger country. You never get anywhere that way. I saw that while I was saving democracy by polishing brasswork thirteen—fourteen months in Pensacola harbor. I saw a lot those days, brother. More'n I got sense to say. I saw the big guys pulling the strings, feeding the people just what they wanted them to think and running this man's world into the cock-eyed mess it is. And no way to stop them, either. And I says to myself, 'Jim Carée, when you get outa this gob's job you're going to stand aside a bit.' See? Just stand aside and watch. They had their will of my blood and bones for two years and I wanted to see if I could see who was doing it all."

"That's me," Davis panted.

He could imagine Carée, with his long, black-ringed eyes, standing coolly aside, asking that question. But himself—

"I didn't know it till you spoke," he said. "I horsed around and got into messes and broke things all to —— and gone. But now you say it—that's me."

They were down in the launch, then, with the dew dropping in great wet gouts, and the stars like soft fire in a purple sky. Carée rolled his length over, staring out at the loom of the more distant land, while his unspellable accents flowed as liquid honey.

"One thing I saw, fella. You're no account unless you got money. They won't even let you stand aside without that. These Britishers, here, they got their eye on me already. I ain't following the rules, you see, so there's something queer, they think. Soon I'll have to leave, like I had to quit Cuba and Barbados, Antigua and the rest. They want you explained, and the only answer they'll listen to is round iron men. Take yourself, tramping the sugar estates, hunting a job. They tell you to go to work —go to work. And when you ask for it they spit in your face."

HE ROLLED closer, his hand closing on Davis' wrist in a compelling grip.

"Listen, fella, suppose I said there was a big stake to be made? A big risk, maybe, but we're men grown, you and I. It's worth it. And with an honest to —— American along— How about it?"

"Spit it out," Davis grunted.

A long pause while Carée packed his pipe. The match flare showed his face, long, thin, with upthrown shadows. In each eye there danced twin, reflected flames. Then the match went out, and in the unseeing darkness he became merely a voice and a sense of warm presence.

"Did you ever run across one of those Indians from the mainland? I caught one once," he said. "That was down on a sand-key off the Orinoco to the south there. He was a little brown guy, smooth as a water moccasin, and all dolled up for Sunday in a toucan feather and a kinda blue pebble stuck through his nose.

"He thought I was going to kill him, sure. Then I did magic; two—three tricks with a half-dollar, and he rubbed his face on my feet and worshiped me. It's kinda funny, having somebody think you're God. Especially when you know you ain't. But it makes you like the one that does it, too.

"I took the pebble off of him and made him tell me where he got it. That took time, him not having any human talk. There we were, with a fire, three—four of them big fan palms, and nothing else but the sea, and the land crabs sitting all around pointing their claws at us. He drew pictures in the sand. A big, bald peak, somewhere up in that mess of mountains. That's Venezuela over there, where all the presidents come from that live out by the savannah back in the Port of Spain, there; the Carupanyo Peninsula, with not a town for four hundred miles, except that stinking little Guiria across the Gulf.

"Twelve sleeps from the coast on the way in, and most-like more on the way out. We'd be getting pretty well shot by then. Mountains and brush and —— knows what all. One —— of a trip, fella, with nothing to fall back on but each other. If anything happens to you in there, you're done, sure."

"Well," Davis grated, "what's the text of it all?"

"That stone the little Warrahoon had stuck in his nose was a sapphire."

"You're dreaming," Davis jeered.

"Then I dreamed me a hundred round guilders, up in Curaçoa," Carée chuckled. I sold it to a Dutch Jew in a place they call Skeedam Skeedyke, or some such. Those Dutch ain't more'n half human. Big fat slob, that Jew was, and so bald it looked like he ought to wear pants on his head. A hundred guilders he gave me, and stung me, at that. It was so big as a peanut, that stone. It wasn't no use bringing it here to Trinidad, you see. These British are too nosey. But up in Curaçoa there's no questions asked. That's how they get their living, up there. One tough place, fella, once you get under the skin of it, and the skin's thin."

Carée rolled over again, smiling grimly as he recalled that time.

"The Jew, he set two buck smokes on me to get that money back again. I laid for them in an alley and wrote me my name in red ink on their —— black ribs.

"Then I filled the tanks with gasoline, bought me two shirts, a mouth organ, a carburetor and some grub. Ninety-seven guilders and forty kronen, that came to, so I went and raised Cain on the rest. You can do it for that in Curaçoa. They starve to death between steamers."

Lip-lap of wavelets against the launch;

strange scents drifting off from the warm land; a man talking of treasure hidden in that almost untrodden wilderness, looming distantly against the stars. Sapphires waiting to be picked up in a hidden valley behind those mountains. The Spanish Main, that was, across the gulf. To Davis, as he listened, it had seemed that this was the dream whose half felt pull had drawn him on.

"There's a swamp where we can hide the launch," Carée was saying. "I did it, a while back, and went nigh on to two days' march. But it's no place for a man alone, fella. I saw that. Nothing but trees, though all you see is their trunks. The rest is a roof way up over your head. All hot and solemn, it is, like a big church built on the hinges of hell. A fella'd go crazy in there all by himself.

"I been looking for a partner since then. None of these Britishers. Not that they ain't white, but their darned 'ow-ow' talk gets my goat. And I'd sooner pick up with a nigger than any of this Spanish trash. But now you've come. How about it, fella?"

THAT had been the start; and the end was not yet. But it loomed closer in Davis' apprehension.

After all, what did he know of Carée?

The fellow had changed so, since they had found the sapphires. Oh, outwardly he was the same, yes; perhaps more so. But Davis found in himself a blighting, almost blinding light of clear seeing.

Where was it that Carée had begun to change. That question seemed important, eating away at his brain with the soft, maddening insistence of some white maggot. And the answer was always the same—After they had found the sapphires.

Not at once. Those days in the valley he had been all right. How they had gloated, by light of the camp-fire, over their day's findings. Not so many, after all. It needed a steam shovel and a sluice really to rifle that hoard. But evening after evening as they counted, the total mounted up. There must be twenty thousand dollars' worth, even at Curaçoa prices, in those canvas bags. Ten thousand apiece. Davis would lie and spin wild plans for what he would do with his share. Carée sat silent the while, his lips curled about the stem of his pipe, now and then dropping a cool—

"Time enough for that, fella. You ain't outa these —— woods yet."

That had been the beginning of it. Probably the plan was just forming in his mind. Strange evenings, those, in that unheard of valley, like a black cup held up to the stars. Not a human habitation within two hundred miles of them. And in the midst, the two, gradually drawing nearer until shoulder pressed shoulder for unconfessed comfort in that solitude.

And even then, with one lean arm thrown about him, Carée had already been planning. The thought made Davis shiver.

Perhaps Carée had not been conscious of it then. Davis remembered now that the real change in the other had not come until his own sickness. The day when, crossing a barren ridge, the sun had seemed to fire his brain to strange visions. He had been growing weaker and weaker since then, with these spells of black mood. And never since then had Carée sat or slept at his side. Always he had kept a space between them. After all, perhaps the fellow had his decencies. He would not strike down under a pretense of friendship .

Carée had been shouldering most of the pack, after that—and the rifle and the ax as well.

The ax and the rifle—those were the final points in Davis' mind; sharp points, on which there was no resting. Never once could he get his hands on either. Always they were on Carée's shoulder or under his reach. And at night they disappeared, so that only Carée himself could find them again. Davis knew better than to show that he noticed it. Carée was always watching him.

One night, camping in a cold valley after crossing the highest ridge, he had crept out to search the bushes for that rifle, or that ax. What he meant to do with them he could not have said, but that maggot of fear was eating again and he ached for the feel of a weapon in his hand. A man has a right to protect himself.

But Carée had heard. The fellow must sleep like a cat. All at once there he was, long and straight, looking down with star twinkles reflected in his shadowed eyes.

"What you doing, fella? Anything you want?"

Anything he wanted. Davis could not hold back his laughter at that. It poured out. All he wanted was to live—live— It

was in that instant that he had actually known Carée's plan. But to show fear would bring the end more quickly upon him. He must go on, go on, watching his chance—watching Carée. He hated the hands that stretched toward him through the darkness in false help. Soothe him down, that was Carée's way. But above all he must never show how he was afraid. He faced it gauntly in his own mind, masking it with a smile.

He was afraid of Carée now. Bitterly, desperately afraid.

On again, day after day in that fight back to the coast. Ridge after ridge where the painted trees tossed sheets of silver light back to the sun. Valley after valley, hot and hushed, where their's were perhaps the first white feet to cross the stream. A lavishness of insensate beauty, lacking the soul which only human touch can give.

Sweat and chill, with those fiery darts in one's head. And always that furry thirst, which made the clear mountain water taste like liquid grease.

Carée, falsely smooth, taking more and more of the weight on his own shoulders. Carée, soothing him in that southern drawl which could so well hide whatever lay behind it.

"Buck up, fella, stick it through. I took you in and I'll bring you out. Gosh, if only that quinine hadn't got all wet up."

It was certain death to remain in there. Yet getting out of it had come to be the thing that Davis most feared.

THE swamp was passed, and yet somehow it had not happened.

All day Davis had been expecting the finish. The thinning growth told of the approaching end. Clumps of gray-green groo-groos fluttered like vast ostrich feathers. Royal palms reared stately heads on smooth white columns. The first coconut told of the sea's proximity. Then, through the branches, came the blue flash of the Caribbean itself. It lay below them, like an infinitude of these sapphires for which they had risked all. And Davis found a hoarse mutter in his throat—

"He's through with me now."

As they reached the swamp, he saw Carée's plan. Creeks of sluggish mud winding through the roseaux brakes. Abhorrent hordes of land-crabs that scuttled and clattered away from before them, only to close sinisterly in behind. Shoals of *ti-tiris*, lying in the shallows and goggling up with eyes like those of absurd sheep. Now and then an endless, flowing something that was a *cribo* snake sliding off among the canes. And overhead, in the intolerable blaze of the sky, two wheeling buzzards which kept leisurely, relentless tab upon their march.

The launch was there, untouched, still as they had left it hidden a month before. As Carée saw it his face seemed to drop a leaden mask of care. That sudden light, and the shout that followed it, told Davis of Carée's plan. He had been deliberately kept until Carée was really sure of his way out.

This swamp was the very place for the end of it, once night settled darkly over its secret foulness. One shot, or one silent chop of the hatchet— One could not tell at what instant it might not come. Once aboard the launch it would be impossible not to turn one's back on Carée at some time or other.

Then a thing which had once been a man, thrown out to that bubbling mud. The land crabs and the buzzards would attend to its burial.

His head pounded like a shipyard with the riveters at work. The blood was as water in his veins, and his feet were immovable things that must somehow be forced on. Yet it was strange how one clings to life—and how he still clung to Carée. As the other broke into a run at the sight of the launch, Davis tried to follow. But his knees failed and as he sank in the scattering shade of the roseaux canes, he heard himself calling out—

"No—no—for ——'s sake, don't leave me here."

Perhaps this was Carée's plan; simply to maroon him there and let sun and swamp do their work. But he had stopped that, at least. For some reason the fellow wasn't ready to be found out yet.

He had come back. That was Carée's arm lifting him up, Carée's voice with something of shock in it.

"Did you think I was going to leave you, fella? Here—lean on me."

He was still —— cunning about it. But Davis could use cunning in return. As he lapsed on Carée's shoulder his hand stole to the ax at the other's belt.

It was too tightly wedged, or he was too

weak. That chance had failed, for Carée had felt the tug. A twist, a light blow, and Davis fell again to those impotent knees, and his mouth spoke its bitterness.

"Kill me now. I know that's what you mean to do. Get it over with now."

He had followed a dream, and this was the end. To finish in a swamp among the clattering roseaux canes, while cruel-eyed, living graves waited the end. And Carée would sail away, with his eternal, cool smile —a murderous beast.

HE MUST have fainted then. The next he knew he was in his bunk on board the launch. They were at sea. There was the cough and sputter of the motor, the sway and swing which told of the long, smooth Caribbean rollers.

Crawling to the cabin door, he looked out. There was the cockpit, smelling of hot grease, the motor throttled down to half speed. Beyond was the stern, shaded by a ragged awning, the steering wheel lashed to its post. And beside it Carée lay prone, his face buried in his arm. For one wild moment Davis thought he was dead. It was like a weight lifted from him. Then, as he crawled nearer, he saw the lift of Carée's lungs beneath his torn shirt.

That sleep was almost like death. He must have had just sense enough to lash the steering gear before he fell from his seat into that coma. An exultant thought seized Davis. Now he could hunt through the boat, find rifle, ax, monkey-wrenches, all the possible weapons there were. He could hide them in his own bunk and stand Carée off. Then those chill, creeping worms turned over in his brain again. He would have to sleep some time, and Carée would wake. It was a two-day run to Curaçoa.. How long had they been afloat?

Carée, of course, was keeping him to stand watch and watch. But once Curaçoa hove in sight—the sea would keep its secrets better than the swamp.

His flesh was on fire, and under it crept that cold fear. If only that pounding would stop in his head. He must think—think.

The sea was like heaving blue glass, beaten down by a warm wind. It was probably afternoon, the sun beginning to slide down its western course. Carée, the thing he feared, lay there at his feet. He had it all in his own hands, and yet— He wondered what kept him from it. It was only self-defense. But it was as if something from some other, cooler, and different life that he had once had, came stealing in to stay his hand.

What he wanted was escape. He sat long, holding his whirling head, trying to stop its spinning pictures of fear. If he could only think—

He could not say how long it was before he saw the island. The haze must have been thicker than he thought, for there it was, all at once, apparently but a few miles away. A long, low land, looming through the sea glint, with yellowish, scorched looking hills above white bluffs. And all about it a ring of surf breaking like hungry teeth over pointed reefs.

Carée must be out in his reckoning, or else they must have already been those two days at sea. In either case, the end of it was near.

But there was the dinghey, rushing after them like an eager pup at the end of its rope— And Carée was asleep.

CARÉE'S sleep would last for hours. But at the rate they were going they would be among those reefs long before he woke. The launch could not live two minutes among those reefs, nor would a swimmer have a chance.

There was the dinghey—and the sapphires. Carée had not hidden them. He had no need to, while he kept ax and rifle under his hand. And the launch was rushing him on toward the judgments of rocks and sea.

Escape, life, and the means of living— As he stepped into the bobbing dinghey, Davis looked back. Carée—asleep; he was somehow sorry for it all. He could have— he had liked the fellow at first. Then fear smote him again. Carée might wake. He dropped astern and cut the rope.

THE sun was terrible on that unshaded boat. He lay on the bottom in stale bilge, fried from above and tossed sickeningly from below. Not until darkness came could he hope to have strength enough to use the oars.

He crawled forward under the thwart to the water beaker. There was no need to unscrew its cap. The heat of the metal told

that it was empty. He stood dizzily up to measure the distance to the land. The launch was out of sight now, and the island—

Something was happening to his eyes. He leaned over the side to dash salt water on his head. Then, as he looked again, the blackest fear of all seemed to close like a cold hand about his stomach.

The island was disappearing.

No trick of haze, no wandering fog belt between him and it to give comforting explanation. The day was as hard and clear as ever, but even as he looked that seemingly solid shore disintegrated, changed and slowly vanished.

Like an actual club across his head, the truth came upon him.

He had thrown all aside, to embark for a mirage.

Sun and thirst, and blue water sparkling within a foot of his mouth. It was madness to drink it, he knew, but he knew also that he actually was a madman just then. Perhaps it would hurry the end. He plunged his head and drank.

SUN, salt water and that relentless heave of the long rollers. Up—down—only to go up again Trees—trees—or was it water?. Every organ of his body seemed to wake in revolt, determined to cast out whatever was in him. He lay in sickening helplessness, waiting for death.

He must have slept after that. The next he knew was darkness and rain, coming down in such sluices as only the tropics can give. He caught it in his hat, drinking again and again. Water, clear from the sky, unmixed with anything of earth. It seemed to put into him something of the cool purity of its cloud source. In an instinct of cleanliness he stripped to the downpour, letting it dash over his body.

If he was to die, he would go at least like a white man.

HE WAS not thinking yet. He did not dare, for there was so much waiting to be faced. Those last days in the high woods—Carée's seeming strangeness—and himself brooding over weird notions. He shut them out, holding himself in deliberate trance, and soon sleep came again.

THE sun was high when he woke, the rain-washed sky like a brilliant crystal. A sapphire crystal, he thought, above a sapphire sea. A fitting finish to it all. There was a voice, too, as of some sea creature calling across the waves. But that was more madness.

Then came the shock of wood on wood, the puffing exhaust of a motor. The boat rocked with impact, and there was Carée looking down at him.

Carée, come to mock—come to do the justice that Davis had brought on himself. His eyes were watchful, alert. Then, as he looked, the strain left them in an exclamation—

"Thank —— you're white again!"

Holding to the thwart, Davis pulled himself to his knees. A fitting posture, he thought, with a tremendous solemnity.

"The bags are in the stern there," he said.

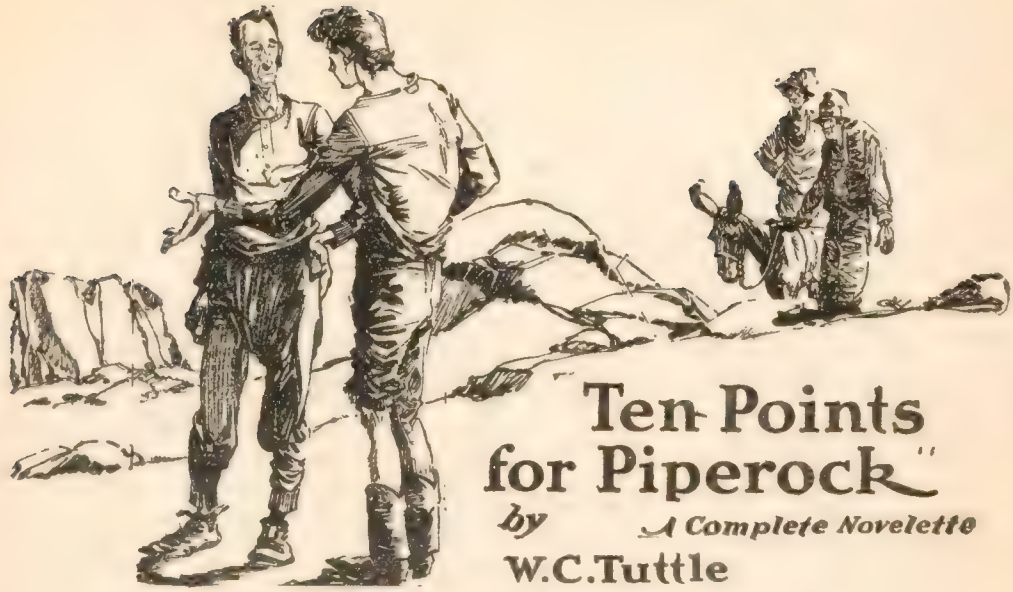
"To —— with the bags. What d'you think I am, fella?"

It was toward himself that Carée was reaching. That was very strange. Like some ghost of himself come to confession, Davis spoke again.

"I—meant to—'

"Come out of it," Carée broke in. "D'you suppose I don't know you've been crazy with all that fever? You near wore me out up in the woods, keeping watch on you. You look like you're over it now. Give me your hand and I'll pull you aboard."

Mirage—all mirage. But Carée was real.



Ten Points for Piperock"

A Complete Novelette

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Hashknife of the Diamond H," "Vanishing Brands," etc.

THE old sayin' that the good die young sure holds good in Yaller Rock county. I've been over it, length, breadth and thickness, for the last ten years of my misguided life, and I've never read a darned tombstone epitaph that didn't show the inmate to have lived at least seventy years except in certain cases of snakebite, exaggerated gun-ego and astigmatism regardin' cattle and horse brands.

A city sportsman wrote to "Dirty Shirt" Jones once and asked Dirty if there was any good shootin' around Piperock. Dirty writes back and says—

"It's so —— near perfect that we ain't had a cripple on our hands since Sittin' Bull stood up."

And that wasn't exaggeratin' much. There's only three towns in our little waterproof community—Piperock, Paradise and Yaller Horse. Yaller Horse don't count—much. They've only got three enterprisin' citizens, which are named "Tombstone" Todd, "Yuma" Yates and "Ornery" Olsen. But they're very broad-minded, them three. Bein' as there's rivalry between Paradise and Piperock, which sometimes assumes the proportions of a massacree, I asks Tombstone one day if him and Yuma and Ornery epresents Yaller Horse.

"Represents Yaller Horse!" snorts Tombstone. "Huh! Say, you listen to me, Ike Harper. Me and Yuma and Ornery represents the whole —— world!"

And after them three gets outside of a few scoops of "Buck" Masterson's shock-water, they includes Mars, Venus and the North Star.

That just shows yuh the mettle of Yaller Horse. Paradise is much larger, meaner in every way, and if the bowels of compassion of the whole darned town were combined in one bunch, they wouldn't fill the carcass of a hummin' bird. Led, aided and abetted by the Cross J outfit, composed of "Jay Bird" Whittaker, owner; "Chuck" Warner, "Muley" Bowles, "Telescope" Tolliver and "Hennery" Peck, Paradise ain't hardly fit for publication.

Piperock is a pretty little town, modest and retirin'. The people are all broad-minded. Just a nice bunch of people, tryin' to get along. In fact, I don't reckon there's a place in the world that's as broad-minded as Piperock. If a Piperock man kills a Paradiser, do yuh think there's any scandal over it? Not a bit. If some of our boys go down to Paradise and steal some horses, does anybody chide 'em? Nossir!

Live and let live—if they can, is our motto. Paradise says that "Magpie" Simpkins runs Piperock. That's a lie. No man could run Piperock. Magpie may get the

town into some awful jambs, but he don't run it. Anyway, that kinda gives yuh an idea of Yaller Rock county. As an artist would say, it's a bit of pastoral, with cows and everythin'.

Me and Dirty Shirt and Eveline have been back in the hills for about a month, lookin' for a lost mine. We had it once. It sure was a dinger of a mine, too. I sent Dirty out with Eveline to get a load of grub, and they came back with a strip of bacon and a case of Three Star Hennessy.

It wasn't a nourishin' grubstake, but it sure exhilarated. Eveline got the bacon, along about the sixth bottle, and me and Dirty takes out after her. We runs her about three miles, loses her down on the breaks of Stony Creek and can't find our way back to the mine. So we pilgrims back to Piperock, waits until she shows up, gets another outfit together and went mine huntin' again. But we can't find the rest of that case of Three Star.

As I said before, we're comin' back to Piperock. Dirty Shirt is a serious-lookin' little jigger, kinda drawn in the face, and he's got one eye that's plumb out of control. It don't make no difference which way Dirty is lookin', that eye shifts for itself. It ain't noways a fixed orbit.

We're nearin' Piperock, clatterin' along over a trail which forks out from a wagon-road, with Dirty leadin', Eveline next and me bringin' up the rear. I'm kinda ploddin' along with my head down, when all to once I bumps into Eveline.

Well informed folks don't bump into Eveline. She just kinda humps up, and I breathed a short prayer. Yuh don't have time for no long-winded exhortation when yuh bump the rear end of Eveline. But the kick didn't come.

And lemme tell yuh, brother, when Eveline misses a chance like that, somethin' sure must interest her. I steps to the high side of the trail without waitin' for her to change her mind, and I saw somethin' that made it reasonable to suppose that Eveline had her mind on somethin' beside me.

Talk about apparitions. There's Magpie Simpkins and "Testament" Tilton standin' in the middle of the road, arguin'. Magpie is six feet six inches tall, as thin and bony as the fossil of a prehistoric sandhill crane, and Testament was built after the same plan and specification, only he's older and dignified, with side-burns and one of the most pious faces yuh ever seen. He's got ashes to ashes written all over him.

And there they stand in the middle of the dusty road, and all they've got on is undershirts and drawers. Magpie's is red and Testament's is blue. Magpie's got on a pair of boots, and the preacher is wearin' a pair of them rubber-sided shoes that they calls Congress gaiters. One leg of Magpie's drawers is pulled up above his knees and the other leg is inside his boot.

Testament's blue drawers have stretched so much that they flap around his skinny legs, and the seat hangs down like a sack. Them two idiots don't see us because they're plumb interested in each other. Magpie drags one foot across the road, makin' a deep furrow in the dust.

Then him and Testament toe this mark, hesitate a moment and go gallopin' down the road toward Piperock, workin' their arms a lot faster than they do their legs. Dirty turns his head and looks at me with his good eye. The other one bobs, jiggles and jumps. I looks back at him, but we don't say nothin'.

After a while Dirty wipes his face with his sleeve and hitches up his belt.

"What did yuh stop for?" I asks.

I wanted to see if he had seen the same thing that I had.

"Oh, I dunno," says Dirty kinda vacant-like. His loose eye loops the loop a few times and he wets his lips with his dry tongue. "You feelin' all right, are yuh, Ike?"

"Yeah, I feel pretty good," says I. "I was just wonderin' if you was all right. You stopped kinda short, yuh know."

"Thasso? Mebby I did. Huh! If Doc Whaley wasn't a horse doctor, I'd see him about my liver."

DIRTY starts down the road and we comes to the place where Magpie made the mark. Dirty stops again, but I'm sure careful to be out of range of Eveline.

Dirty points at that mark and fixes his good eye upon me.

"There it is!" he snorts, kinda glad-like. "I seen him make it, Ike! Now, darn yuh, what did you see?"

"Well," says I, "I ain't never been noted for my memory, but I'll back what I seen against what you seen, Dirty."

"Magpie and Testament, Ike?"

"The same. Réd and blue, Dirty?"

"Red and blue, Ike. Kinda baggy. Went gallopin' away together?"

"Gallopin'," says I.

"Liver's in good shape, Ike. F'r a minute or two I wondered if we hadn't found that Three Star and got so drunk that we didn't remember it. What in —— do yuh reckon it all means?"

I didn't know any more about it than he did, that's a cinch. But deep within me, I has a premonition of evil. I feel that all is not well with anythin', and I wonders if it is best for us to go to Piperock.

"Well," says Dirty, who is sort of a philosopher, "I don't know of any two men I'd sooner see in a lunatic asylum. Let's fare forth."

Bein' as there's plenty of room to walk, we both precedes our burro, Eveline, and heads for Piperock. We don't see no more strange sights on the road. Piperock sets out there on a flat spot among the hills, a lot of gray buildings, strugglin' to keep upright. The main street is crooked and not very wide. The first buildin' on the left is the home of "Wick" Smith, who owns the general store and the longest mustache in the whole county—and mind yuh, hair grows well among us folks.

Wick's got a picket fence around his house, about five feet high, and when we're almost to the fence we sees Wick come a-gallopin' toward the fence, packin' a long pole in his hands. He's stripped to his undershirt and is wearin' a pair of overalls, the legs of which have been stagged off above his knees.

He comes bustin' toward that fence, wavin' that pole, his mustache stringin' out behind him in the wind.

"My ——!" wails Dirty Shirt. "What's he tryin' to do, Ike?"

Just about that time Wick sticks one end of that pole in the ground and tries to heave himself over that five-foot fence on the other end of it.

Up high he goes, kinda changes ends up there in the air when the stick breaks in the middle, and down comes Wick Smith, upside down outside the fence. I thinks that this is just the day and date that Wick Smith broke his —— neck, but a picket slides up inside of his boot, and all he got was a bumped head on the sidewalk.

Anyway the bump was hard enough to leave Wick hangin' there, like an old blanket, hooked over a picket, kinda swayin'. Me and Dirty look at each other, and this time Dirty's eye is doin' some perfect figure eights.

"Dud-do yuh th-think we ought to dud-do somethin'?" asks Dirty.

I nodded and pointed toward Buck Masterson's sign.

"There's only one thing that'll do us any good, Dirty," says I. "We need somethin' to make us forget."

We turns away from Wick Smith and heads for Buck's place. We hears some wimmin gabblin', and we looks back to see Mrs. Smith, who carries plenty of weight for age, and some more wimmin kinda clusterin' around Wick and tryin' to bust off the picket.

"It looks to me as if every brain in the town had gone to roost," says Dirty Shirt, as we tie Eveline to one of Buck's porch-posts.

Just then Pete Gonyer, Piperock's village blacksmith, comes out of his shop. He's got a hunk of railroad iron on a chain. It looks like the danged thing would weigh about fifty pounds.

He starts doin' a ring-around-a-rosy, diggin' his heels in, swingin' that iron around and around. Then he gives a "Woosh!" and lets the darned thing loose. It sails right toward me and Dirty, who falls flat to stave off sudden death, and that hunk of iron knocks down the post that Eveline is tied to. A piece of Buck's porch comes down with it, and we rolls almost to the door.

"F'r ——'s sake!" complains Dirty, kinda awed-like. "Ain't nobody safe in this locoed town?"

Pete staggers over against the shop, mops his brow, gets his bearin's and begins pacin' off the distance to where the railroad iron landed, which is right behind Eveline's hind feet.

Pete steps up to the iron, turns and looks back at the shop where he started from.

Whap! Eveline hit him dead-center with both heels, hit him just half way up and down. It knocks Pete's eyes out of line with his vision, but he just stands there. Eveline turns her head and looks at him, kinda sorrowful like.

"Not dead, but sleepin'," whispers Dirty.

Pete kinda shakes his head and rubs his belt-buckle.

"I've gotta do better 'n that," says he hoarse-like.

"You jist wait until yuh try to keep somethin' on yore stummick, and you'll know how well yuh done," says Dirty.

Just then Buck Masterson limps out of his saloon. Buck is kind of a floppy person, packin' too much lard around his equator, which makes the two top buttons of his pants nothin' but ornyments. But he ain't the same Buck we used to know.

He's limpin' in both legs, and one arm is in a sling. One side of his face has been plentifully peeled, and when he looks at us and tries to grin, we can see that two of his front teeth are missin'.

Pete falls down, gets up and goes weavin' past, draggin' that weight on a chain, his expression very serious.

"How 'r yuh comin', Pete?" asks Buck.

But Pete don't say. He hits one shoulder against the wide door of his shop and falls inside. Me and Dirty lean against the wall and look Buck over.

"I reckon Pete ain't satisfied," observes Buck.

"Yuh can't please some folks," says Dirty.

We foller Buck into the place and leans on the bar.

"You fellers will have to help yourselves," opines Buck. "I ain't got no use of my hands and my feet won't track. Jist help yourselves and put the money on the back bar.

He sets down in a chair, while me and Dirty imbibes quite an amount of pain-killer. After while we feels that our organization is complete, so we calls a conference and lets Buck set in on it.

"How did yuh arrive at this physical state, Buck?" I asks.

"High hurdles," says Buck.

"He said high hurdles, didn't he, Ike?" asks Dirty.

"Them was his words."

"High hurdles is somethin' yuh jump, ain't it, Buck?"

"Yea-a-ah, yuh try to jump 'em, Dirty." Buck groans and shifts his body. "I was doin' pretty good at it, too. 'Course I knocked a lot of 'em down, bein' as I ain't noways filled with agility. Magpie says I'm losin' too much time in fallin' down and gittin' up, so he braced them there hurdles so I can't knock 'em down. I'm the howlin' example of a man who hit a hurdle that didn't fall."

ME AND DIRTY looks at each other, walks over behind the bar and each takes a bottle. We kinda figures that if we're crazy, we're goin' to be happy along with it. Then we sets down with Buck again.

"Jumpin'," says Dirty, chokin' over his last one, "seems to have took hold right smart around here, Buck."

"Uh-huh. It takes practise to learn it."

"Learn jumpin'?"

"Bein' a ath-leet. We're all ath-leets, Dirty."

"Thasso?" Dirty's eye jerks to a stand-still. "I've heard of Holy Rollers, but I never heard of Holy Jumpers. What for kind of a revival has hit Piperock? If you jiggers want to git up high, why don'tcha climb a tree?"

"Ain't you heard about us goin' to have a track meet?"

"A track meet what, Buck?"

"Just a track meet, Dirty."

Dirty pours out the rest of his bottle and walks out of the place. He's naturally nervous, and I sees him swing the holster of his gun around behind him, where he can't get at it without quite a lot of trouble. Right now he's what you'd call a potential killer.

"Didja hear how Magpie and Testament came out?" asks Buck.

"Half-naked," says I. "What in —— is the idea of that shirt-tail parade, Buck? Has everybody gone loco around here?"

Just at that time Magpie Simpkins comes in. He's got all his clothes on now, but he looks kinda drawn.

"Hyah, Ike," says he, shakin' hands with me. "When didja get in?"

"Just behind you and Testament."

"Yea-a-ah? Didja see us runnin'?"

"What kinda time did yuh make?" interrupts Buck.

"Unreliable," says Magpie sorrowful. "I tell yuh Testament ain't never goin' to be able to run a mile, Buck. He weaves too much. Can't even stay on his own side of the road. Fell down three times and I fell over him."

"Well, I dunno what we'll do with him, Magpie."

"Shoot him," says I, "and see if I care."

"We need every man," declares Magpie seriously. "I'm glad you showed up, Ike. Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party."

I put my bottle on the floor and slid my gun around into my lap. Human nature can stand just so much, and I can feel my heartstrings tighten until I kinda hum to myself.

"Yuh better tell me about it," says I. "I've seen more idiotic things done in the last half hour than I've ever seen in all the rest of my life, and I crave an explanation."

"He dunno what it's about, Magpie," explains Buck.

"Well, I reckon that's right," agrees Magpie, crossin' his legs and makin' up a painful face. "It's like this, Ike—Paradise started it. Chuck Warner and Hennery Peck just got back from dry-nursin' a shipment of Cross J cows to Chicago, and they opines that track meetin' is the latest thing bein' done. They sees a few of these things done, so they comes back to Paradise and brings their advanced views.

"Paradise takes to it like a calf to milk, and they proclaims that Paradise is the champeen cow-town track-meeters of the world, if not more. This here activity consists of feet-racin', high-jumpin', throwin' the weight, hurdle-racin', et cettery. For each and every event the winners git so many points. After it's all over, the town with the most points wins. See the idea, Ike?"

"Uh-huh. It's just another alibi to start a killin' between Paradise and Piperock, eh?"

"No-o-o, I wouldn't say that, Ike. Yaller Horse is goin' to enter their team."

"They ain't got enough men down there."

"That's their loss, Ike. Tombstone, Yuma and Ornery swear to uphold the athletic supremacy of Yaller Horse. They've entered everythin' except the tug-of-war, which requires ten men on a side. Now, you and Dirty Shirt can pick out what yuh want to do. It's kinda short notice, but there's two days left for yuh to train.

"Me and Testament are entered in the mile run and the hundred yard dash, Buck is our high-hurdler, and Pete Gonyer throws the weight. Wick Smith pole-vaults and high-jumps. Rickey Henderson does our broad-jumpin' and quarter-milin'. There'll be plenty of events, so you and Dirty can take yore pick."

"Me and Dirty," says I, "will do the fifty-mile dash. We'll start tomorrow mornin'."

"There ain't no such an event," declares Buck. "Yuh can't run no fifty miles, Ike."

"The —— I can't! Knowin' what I know about these three towns, and what they do at a celebration, fifty miles ain't noways a safe distance to put between me and them. I'll get old Dirty Shirt and explain the details of our event."

"You'll go down to the shack with me, Ike," says Magpie. "If a man ain't got no civic pride, he needs teachin'. Loyalty is our watchword. It ain't no crime to lose, but it's jist too bad for the man who won't even try."

"You ain't noways tryin' to hoodle me into doin' somethin' that my whole nature rebels against, are yuh?" I asks.

"Yore nature needs a little tinkerin' with, Ike. In a case of this kind, when the fair name of our city is at stake, we will do our best at things that might irk us sore. Do you want little Yaller Horse to point the finger of scorn at us?"

"Well," says I, "I can't neither run nor jump unless I'm scared."

"All right," says Magpie firm-like, "we'll hope for the best. This here track meet is to be held in a spirit of brotherly love, but if it takes violence for one of us to do our best, we gets violent. C'mon with me, Ike."

AND that's the kind of a deal that me and Dirty Shirt Jones runs into. The deck was stacked when we set in. Magpie got me down to our shack and he filled me so full of local pride that I went out and kicked Eveline.

A little later on I finds Dirty Shirt. He's been havin' a session with "Scenery" Sims, "Hair Oil" Heppner, Testament and "Ricky" Henderson, who attended him in a body to impress upon him that Piperock expected everything of him except his immortal soul—unless they needed that at the last moment.

Dirty is settin' on the sidewalk, tryin' to balance a bottle on his knees, while he does a rock-a-by-baby on the seat of his pants. Dirty is so mad that his bad eye refuses to do its regular gallop and remains mute and starin'.

"I ain't no —— hurdle-horse," he wails. "Can't yuh see me, runnin' down the main street of Paradise with nothin' on but my drawers, hoppin' over hurdles? My ——, can't a man be civic prideful and still retain his modesty? Ike, I'm a man among men, I am. Clad in the raiment of civilization, I

don't git more'n a passin' glance—but in the rough!"

"Can't yuh jump with yore clothes on?" I asks.

"It ain't accordin' to Hoyle, they tells me. Have a drink?"

"Uh-huh."

"You'll need it. They've picked you to do the hundred-yard dash agin' Yuma Yates and "Half-Mile" Smith. And Lemme tell yuh somethin' sad about that said e-vent: Yaller Horse has bet their last shirt that Yuma wins."

"I can beat him," says I.

It seems that I got more civic pride out of that last drink than Magpie pounded into me in an hour.

"Yuh can," says Dirty dry-like. "But Tombstone Todd has been appointed to start that race with a six-gun, and Ornery Olsen is one of the judges. Now you jist try runnin' ahead of Yuma Yates. Why you'd step right off that race-track on to a damp cloud and say, 'Good mornin', Pete'."

"That would be murder, Dirty!"

"Git yore own satisfaction out of it if yuh can. A lot of good it'll do yuh when y're takin' harp lessons."

"All right," says I, reachin' for the bottle, "I'll lose."

"If yuh do," says Dirty, "it better be because Yuma or Half-Mile can outrun yuh, because Piperock will shore look for a flaw in yore franchise."

"Dirty," says I, "let's me and you slide out while the slidin' is good."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Brother, I had that in my mind. Jist try to get away."

"Well, my ——, are we prisoners?"

"Jist like the Jews was before Moses found out how to pound water out of a rock. It's a case of do or die, Ike. If there's any safety in delirium tremens, I'm goin' to try and get me a pet snake. Why don't cha go and buy a bottle for yourself?"

"Because," says I, "I've got jist enough money for a decent burial. If I've got to die to make a Paradise holiday, I crave the benefit of clergy and a silver-handled coffin."

The next day Bill McFee, the sheriff of Yaller Rock County, came to Piperock and has a talk with Magpie. Bill limps in one leg and he's got a kink in his neck that kinda makes him look over his left shoulder.

"Was yuh tryin' to see the moon over yore left shoulder?" I asks him.

"Moon, ——!" snorts Bill. "I've been high-jumpin'. I've been designated by Paradise to do this chore for our outfit. Last night I came down and caught my chin on the cross-bar. That's what makes me kinda set about the neck."

Him and Magpie argues a heap over the details of this here "Army-giddeon," as Bill calls it. They tries to frame some way which will make everybody leave their guns at home, but they both know it can't be done. "What is home without a mother?" might be changed to "What is Yaller Rock without a six-gun?" It was jist at this time that I finds out that we're to celebrate Labor Day. I thought it was just goin' to be a promiscuous killin' on an open date, but finds that it's a holiday affair.

"And the track meet ain't all there is," declares Bill. "Old Jay Bird Whittaker, aided by several of our outstandin' citizens, has engaged the services of Professor W. A. Rewin, the noted balloonist, to do his stupendous parachute drop. It's costin' us two hundred and fifty dollars for the one drop, too.

"And there's goin' to be a ath-leetic parade before the big track meet in which the flower of our young manhood will appear. Magpie, it's goin' to be the finest thing we ever done."

"And prob'ly the last," says I. "When a lot of these knobby-kneed snake-hunters start paradin' in their underclothes, it'll excite the crowd to violence. I may run but I won't exhibit."

"You'll do what the rest do," declares Magpie.

"Then I'll git me a blanket and represent the Red Men of America, by golly!"

The next day me and Dirty Shirt went to Paradise. I reckon Piperock wasn't afraid we'd desert 'em. After all, Piperock is our home, be it ever so violent. They don't bring out no brass bands to meet us at Paradise, nor did anybody ask us to make a speech.

They're fixin' up a section of the main street for this wonderful event, so me and Dirty has to circle around the town and tie our horses at the far side. Over in a big vacant place, just off the main street, is quite a crowd standin' around a pile of dirty-lookin' canvas. So we moseys over there and takes a look.

Muley Bowles, Telescope Tolliver, Hennery Peck and Chuck Warner are hooked to the wooden end of some picks and shovels

and are diggin' a trench. It's the first time I ever seen any of that bunch doin' work, and it's quite a novelty.

"Did somebody lose a nickel?" I asks Muley, who is short and fat.

He pants heavy-like for a while, gives me a dirty look and goes back to work.

"This shore is somethin' that ought to be in a museum," declares Dirty. "The Cross J outfit—workin'! Diggin'!"

I appeals to Half-Mile Smith to tell me how such a thing comes about, and Half-Mile takes me back toward Mike Pelly's saloon, while he elucidates the reasons thereof.

"This here Professor W. A. Rewin is a female woman," says Half-Mile. "Purty as a pitcher, too. Gosh darn it, Ike, there ain't never been nothin' seen around here to equal her. Wears tights, I s'pose. She jist intimates that she's got to have a trench dug out there where she gasses up her balloon, and she ain't no more than said it when the Cross J outfit—" Half-Mile shakes his head sad-like. "That's what love does to yuh, Ike."

"They ain't all in love with her, are they, Half-Mile?"

"You meanin' the Cross J?"

"Yeah."

"Huh! That's only part of it. Every danged hemale in Paradise is follerin' her around."

"All, except you, Half-Mile. You ain't follerin' her."

"Well," says Half-Mile, twistin' his mustache, which is three inches longer on one side than it is on the other, "I start in where others leave off. Let's me and you drink a toast to my good luck."

OVER at Mike's place we meets Tombstone Todd and Ornery Olsen. They're inoculated against everythin'. Me and Tombstone never was friends. The time that Magpie was elected sheriff of the county I accepted the job of bein' deputy because I figured to get a chance to hang Tombstone. I knowed that Magpie would ask me to drop the trap, and I gloated for two years. That's how much love is lost between me and Tombstone.

"Howdy, you Piperock pickpocket," greets Tombstone.

"Howdy, you Yaller Horse yegg," says I.

Mike slides his riot-gun across the bar and begs us to not start any scandal.

"I don't want no trouble," says I. "I comes here in a spirit of brotherly love, but no dirty sidewinder from the one-lung hamlet of Yaller Horse can belittle me."

"Twelve buckshot in a barrel," warns Mike.

"Don't point," wails Ornery. "My ——, it ain't etikette to point things, Mike. Put down that gun, you rum-ruiner, before I come around there and shove yore legs down them barrels and leave yuh to hop all the rest of yore life."

"Me and Ike came to get a drink," states Half-Mile. "I'm a Paradiser from my belt-buckle both ways, but I've hid the hatchet f'r today and I'm bubblin' with the milk of kindness. In fact, I'm gobby with it. So danged gobby that I'll buy a drink for everybody."

"That buries my hatchet," nods Mike. "Welcome to our progressive city, Ike, old pardner. You ort to live here."

"I'm goin' to some day," says I.

"When?" asks Ornery.

"I'm goin' to make a stable out of this saloon when Piperock annexes Paradise."

"When Piperock annexes Paradise?" Tombstone wiggles his nose for a moment and then busts out laughin'. "When Piperock annex—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Tha's good, Ike! Bes' I ever heard!"

"Ike, are you hankerin' for a halo?" queries Mike, reachin' for his riot-gun.

"Let that gun alone!" snorts Tombstone. "Ike was jokin'."

"The trouble with you jiggers is that you can't stand for anybody sayin' things about yore town, Mike," opines Ornery.

Things go from bad to worse, so I walks out. These three-cornered fights don't interest me. I'm loyal to Piperock, but I don't lay down no lives for her. Wasn't it Patrick Henry that said he was sorry he didn't have more 'n one life to give for his country?

Well, if I had as many lives as a cat, I wouldn't give up one o' em for all of Yaller Rock county. This here dead hero stuff don't appeal to me a-tall.

I finds Dirty Shirt after while. He's settin' on the sidewalk, aromatic with perfume, eatin' candy hearts. I sets down about ten feet away from him and watches him read the epitaphs on them candy hearts. He smiles sweet-like and sighs over each one.

"What in —— is eatin' on you?" I asks.

"Nothin' eatin' on me, Ike. I was jist candy hungry."

"That's why yuh was takin' 'em from one pocket and puttin' 'em in the other, eh?"

"Was I?" Dirty Shirt tries to smile sweet-like.

If you ain't never seen Dirty try to smile thataway, yuh don't know what I mean.

Then I gets a hunch.

"Dirty," says I, "have yuh seen the balloonist?"

He nods slow-like and tries to polish a thumb-nail on the knee of his chaps.

"Pretty, is she?"

"I talked with her," says he, ignorin' the question, and his eyes has a far-away look. "She comes out of the post-office and speaks to me, jist like she always knowed me. Said a face like mine invited confidence. I told her who I was."

"You was perfectly safe, Dirty, because they don't send wimmin after horse-thieves."

But Dirty don't even hear what I said. He sighs and shakes his head.

"Beautiful thing," says he almost in a whisper. "Golden ha'r, ruby lips and eyes like di'monds."

"Fool's gold, paint and cut-glass," says I. "I'll bet she ain't got a soul as big as a postage stamp."

"She's wonderful, Ike."

"I'll buy yuh a drink, Dirty."

"No more, Ike, no more. I'm through. She said it was wonderful to be out here in the wide, wide West where men are men."

"Where in —— do yuh suppose she came from, Dirty?"

"From Heaven," mutters Dirty.

"Mebbe," says I, "that's why she owns a balloon. She's tryin' to get back where she belongs. Yo're as crazy as a shepherd, Dirty."

I looks around and here comes the lady with Mike Pelley, Tombstone Todd and Jay Bird Whittaker.

She gives me sort of a shock, too. By golly, she sure is a beautiful woman. Dirty takes one look at her escorts, puts his head between his hands and groans out loud. Mebbe he figures he ain't got no chance with them three. But that's the way love affects some folks. I sure got a good look at this female as they went past, and I didn't blame Dirty—much. If I'd 'a' been sober enough, I'd 'a' prob'ly joined 'em, but I fell down, tryin' to get on to the sidewalk, and gave up the idea.

"'F I could only git her away where I could talk to her, I—I might—say somethin' to her," says Dirty.

"I'll bet yuh would. In the meantime you better come over and have a drink with me. Remember, tomorrow you've got to help Piperock uphold its dignity."

"I—I know," nods Dirty, kinda gloomy-like, "But suppose her parachute don't open?"

"Don't they always open?"

"She says they don't."

"Uh-huh," says I. "I was wonderin' why she spoke to you, but that answers it. She's used to takin' chances. C'mon and drink."

"You go to ——! You ain't got no soul!"

Dirty didn't go back to Piperock with me that night. The last I seen of him he was settin' in the office of the Paradise hotel, humped up in a chair, readin' candy-hearts. Paradise is athletic-crazy. Just before I left Mike Pelley's place, I seen Tombstone and Half-Mile, each of 'em with a billiard cue, tryin' to pole-vault the bar, and out in the moonlight was Bill McFee, the sheriff, tryin' to jump a hitch-rack. I'm due to run a hundred yards tomorrow, and I ain't trained a bit, because—what's the use? Win or lose, I'll prob'ly get shot. At least, shot at. It's a grand outlook, folks.

I went back to Piperock and finds Magpie in our shack, rubbin' himself with horse liniment. Both of his knees are skinned, and he yells like —— when the liniment gets on 'em. But he don't get a bit of sympathy from me.

"You better win that hundred-yard dash," he tells me. "We kinda figure on that win for Piperock, and when Piperock figures on a win—"

"I dunno how fast I can run," I tells him. "Paradise and Yaller Horse both figures to win. I ain't figured out yet whether I'll run first, second or third."

"Nothin' less than first will suit us, Ike."

"And I may not run at all, Magpie. I'll be —— if I'm goin' to have my future all cramped up over a foot-race. It ain't worth it, I tell yuh."

"It ain't, eh?" Magpie yanks his mustache and glares at me. "Don't supremacy mean anythin' to you, you bow-legged cross between a—a—well, you know what I mean."

"In a fight, yeah. But not in a foot-race. I can run fast enough to suit me, and that's all I care."

"It ain't enough, Ike. You've got to win, *sabe?* And what's more, we've appointed you to be anchor-man on Piperock's tug-of-war team, consistin' of me, Testament, Pete, Ricky, Wick Smith, Scenery Sims, Hair-Oil Heppner, Buck Masterson, Dirty Shirt and you. Ten good men and true, Ike. By golly, we'll pull Paradise off the map."

"Anchor-man, eh?"

"Yeap. Yo're the only man on our side that has the rope tied around yuh. Yo're at the end, *sabe?*"

"At the end of my rope, eh? Significant, I'd say. But yuh better not depend on Dirty Shirt Jones. He's fell in love with the balloon lady."

"Balloon lady? ——, that ain't no lady. We hired a man. His name is Professor W. A. Rewin. I ought to know. I donated ten dollars to the fund."

"All right," says I. "It's the prettiest lady I ever seen, and if she's a man, I'm a Eskimo. Paradise is willin' to let her tromp all over 'em. Nothin' like her ever came to Yaller Rock County before, Magpie."

"Is that so? Hm-m-m. Well, I reckon I better go down there and see if everythin' is set for tomorrow. I've got some details to talk over with Bill McFee. You go to bed and git a good sleep, Ike. Tomorrow is goin' to be a gala day."

I knew that would get Magpie. Jist mention a pretty girl, give him her address, and he's gone. But he always comes back because he ain't never found one half-witted enough to excuse his looks.

I spends part of the night fixin' me up a shoulder-holster for my six-gun. I can partly conceal it under my undershirt—if they make me dress thataway—and I sewed one of my undershirts to a pair of drawers because I've always heard that in union there was strength. Anyway, I don't want to come apart—not when I'm runnin' full blast.

THE next mornin' we goes to Paradise. Sounds fine, don't it? The feller that named the place must 'a' had what they call a reverse-English complex. Piperock goes down there in a body—men, wimmin and children, dogs, et cettery.

Yaller Horse is already there, and friendship has ceased. It looks to me as if we had met to do battle instead of holdin' a friendly lot of contests. Yaller Horse is carryin' more arms than the Mexican army ever had at any one period.

I finds Dirty Shirt out behind Mike Pelley's saloon, and he sure looks like Custer's Last Stand, if yuh know what I mean. He's settin' on a beer keg, doin' a mental battle with himself. Ever and anon he drinks from a bottle.

"How goeth the war, General?" I asks him.

He looks at me with one eye and sighs plumb down to the keg.

"I am in the slough of despond, Ike, old friend," says he. "I am on the eve of a great discovery."

"Owin' to the balloon female?" I asks.

"Fate," says he. "I am in the throes of—of—what-cha-call-it. Gosh ding it, Ike! To be or not to be, that's the question."

"To be what, Dirty?"

"A—a martyr to love or a traitor to my own heart."

"If I was you, I'd shoot myself," says I.

"There is no sting to death, Ike."

"Use a shotgun at forty paces and there will be. And you'd better quit tippin' that bottle or yuh won't be in any shape to help Piperock today."

I left Dirty on his keg and went back to the street. There's a lot of preparations goin' on. The list of entries are posted in front of the saloon, and they've made it a rule that nobody is allowed to run if they ain't on that list. I sees that me and Yuma Yates and Half-Mile Smith are to run a hundred yards.

Tombstone Todd is the starter, while Magpie, Mike Pelley and old "Sizzlin" Singleton of Yaller Horse are to be the judges. When Tombstone is entered in a race, Testament Tilton is to do the startin'. Lookin' over that entry list is just like lookin' at a page in the Horse-Thieves' Blue Book. Outside of me there ain't a man in the bunch that could prove an alibi on anything.

Magpie, Buck Masterson and Hair Oil Heppner comes to me and leads me aside.

"Ike," say Magpie, "does you realize the enormity of yore chore? Does you realize that the eyes of the world are upon yuh? This day and date Piperock depends on her valiant sons. Ye have been choosed to

pack her banner for a hundred yards, so look, listen but don't stop. Accordin' to our observations, you can beat Yuma Yates and Muley Bowles. You've got the only cinch race on the list, and we expects yuh to come through with flyin' colors."

"We not only expects it, Ike," says Hair Oil solemn-like, "but we hinges a lot of our bets upon yuh. Right now, yore fleet legs are packin' forty of my hard earned dollars, three lean heifers and a pair of work horses. Buck Masterson has bet sixty dollars at two to one on yore nose, and Buck ain't no danged philanthropist. Takin' it by and large, I reckon yore performance is bein' looked upon by more than what you'd call a passin' glance."

"I only bets on a cinch," orates Buck. "I know you can run, Ike. Agin' Yuma and Muley yuh ought to look like a rabbit in a race agin' a couple of indigent warthawgs. We know yo're goin' to win."

"Just about how fast can yuh run?" asks Magpie.

"Well," says I, "if you'll point my nose away from this —— town, and give me ten feet head start, I'll betcha there ain't nothin' bearin' the breath of life that can beat me to the Wyomin' border."

"Such speed is gratifyin'," says Buck. "I'm goin' to stand up at the startin' line, seein' that there ain't no unfair advantage taken, and I can hit yore hat three times out of five at a hundred yards, Ike. I expect yuh to do jist a little better than yore best, *sabe?*"

While I appreciates this well meant advice, it don't make me calm, so I went over to Pelley's saloon and draped myself on the bar, where I wigwags the bartender.

"Want somethin' soft, Ike?" he asks.

"To throw my fit on, yuh mean?"

"No, to drink. Yuh see, I've got my orders to not sell any liquor to a track meet contestant, Ike. I'm sure sorry, but it's somethin' that I ain't got no more control over than I have of yore morals."

"Yuh mean to say I can't buy a drink?" I asks.

"Them are my orders, Ike. Paradise desires to pull this off in a safe and sane manner, even if it curtails trade."

I went outside and found Dirty on his keg. He's still in conference with himself. He fixes me with his good eye and smiles like an undertaker.

"Ike, I'm goin' to do it," says he.

"Do what?"

"Be a hero."

"Good. Be two heroes. One for me."

I gave him some money and told him what to do with it. There's more than one way to defeat law and order. Then me and him sets down in the shade and "how's" each other until the world becomes all pink and rosy. I forgets my duty to Piperock and don't realize the tempusin' of fugit until Magpie and Buck finds me.

"The bettin' on you is seven to one," says Magpie kinda sad-like, "and I finds you in this condition. C'mon and help me, Buck."

Things ain't exactly clear to me, but I've got an idea they took me down to the livery stable and ducked me in the trough. Anyway, I finds myself back up the street, wearin' nothin' but my underclothes, the ones I sewed together, which was plumb lucky for me. But they left me my belt around my waist.

I've still got my gun in the shoulder-holster, and it's rubbed most of the skin off my upper ribs. I'm kinda in a daze. There is an awful lot of folks borderin' the street, and they're all yellin'. Magpie shoves me around and I finds myself along with Yuma Yates and Half-Mile. Half-Mile is short and fat, with a face like a full moon.

He ain't got no shirt on at all, and he's wearin' somethin' that looks a heap like a diaper. Yuma is barefooted, wearin' an old undershirt with no sleeves, but he's got on a pair of pants.

"Ike's drunk," says old Testament Tilton. "We'll have to get somebody to run in his place, Magpie."

"Yuh will not," declares Mike Pelley. "Ike Harper is listed, and we agreed to run thataway. Yuh can't substitute."

"Yuh can scratch him if yuh want to," says Tombstone, who is packin' a big gun in his hand.

"Scratch ——!" explodes Magpie. "As soon as this race is over, if he don't win, he'll get worse than scratchin'."

"All right, gents," says Tombstone. "We're ready to go."

Magpie shoves me around, so that my feet are in line with the feet of my gladiator friends.

"Are yuh ready?" roars Tombstone.

"I don't have to start until I'm ready, do I?" I asks.

"Not till yo're ready, Ike," says Tombstone.

"All right," says I. "Let's make it next July."

THIS got quite a laugh from me, but it didn't seem funny to the rest of 'em. Magpie put his hand on my shoulder, whispers some words of great cheer and tells Tombstone that I'm all ready for shipment.

Wham!

I reached for my shoulder holster, thinkin' that somebody had started shootin' at me already, but Magpie gave me a shove and I had to run real fast to keep from fallin' down. I forgot that Tombstone was startin' the races with a six-shooter, and it kinda caught me flat-footed.

Half-Mile got off first, they tell me. He's plumb fast for about thirty feet when he stumbles and falls plumb across the path of Yuma Yates, who caught his toe in Half-Mile's ribs and turns a handspring. And into them comes Ike Harper, Esquire, whose legs can't quite run fast enough to keep him upright.

Of course I didn't know it was an accident. I thought somebody had tripped me on purpose, and within me welled a great civic pride. I had been foully dealt with, and I seeked a retaliation. Mebbe the other two fleet-footed persons had the same idea.

I know I hit Yuma Yates on the nose. He wore a pretty good sized one, and that punch didn't make it any smaller. Then all three of us tangled out there in the middle of the street, while the population of Yaller Rock County waded through and walked over us, tryin' get us apart.

When they hauled me out, I found that one of my hind legs had lost all sense of direction, and my right ear is just about as stationary as the dial on a safe. Yuh can twirl it around. Half-Mile and Yuma are both knocked out, so nobody knows just where they ache the worst.

They led me over and set me on the sidewalk, while the committee goes into conference. After a while Magpie comes back to me and says he's got some good news.

"After every other event is run off," says he, "we'll run that race all over ag'in. I reckon Half-Mile and Yuma are too badly hurt to give yuh much opposition."

"Yeah, I'm a big, strong man," says I. "My ——, I've got one anti-movement leg. How in —— can I run?"

"You've got to run, Ike. It's like this—there's ten events. The winner in each event is all that counts, Ike. Ten points to the winnin' side, *sabe?* Of course, Yaller Horse ain't got but three men to enter, which prevents 'em from enterin' the tug-of-war event. So we've decided that Piperock and Paradise will tug for five points. This gives Yaller Horse a chance."

"Things like that don't interest me," says I. "I'm dyin' by inches right now. I may or may not last until the sun is set. If we'd 'a' had a referee instead of a judge, I'd 'a' won that race. I've already got two knockouts to my credit."

"Well, you jist take it easy now, Ike. Git in shape because we may need yuh bad."

"That's how you'll get me, Magpie. I can't run, but I can shoot."

The pole-vault was the next event. They puts up the posts and gets ready. Wick Smith was the first contestant. He comes gallopin' down the street, misjudges his distance and goes just high enough to hit his mouth on the bar, knocks out three teeth and wrenches his right wrist so badly that he limps all over the place.

Muley Bowles, on which Paradise pins her faith, goes plenty high, turns over in the air, lands all spraddled out and sprains his ankle so bad that they have to pack him off the street.

Then Tombstone Todd puts the bar down about two feet off the ground, vaults over it and claims the points. There's an awful yelp goes up from both Paradise and Piperock, but they has to agree that Tombstone is the only livin' competitor, and that neither Muley nor Wick can equal his vault.

That gives Yaller Horse ten points. It also puts Yaller Horse in bad repute, but they don't care. Yaller Horse is so mean anyway that the coyotes won't even howl at the moon if it happens to be shinin' on that town.

I manages to drag myself into the saloon, where I finds nobody. I help myself to anythin' I want, as long as I'm able, and I'm sure able just about now. There's a lot of yelling out in the street, and later I finds that Bill McFee had won the high jump for Paradise. From the noise you'd think he'd just been elected president.

I went out the back door and finds Dirty Shirt still on his little keg.

"Whazzamatter?" he asks, kinda owl-eyed. "Whazza noise 'bout?"

"I dunno, Dirty. The track meet is bein' met. Whatcha doin' out here all alone?"

"Holdin' a conference," says Dirty.

In his one eye is a desperate resolve. Of course yuh have to know a feller pretty well to read a desperate resolve in one eye while the other eye is doin' a jig.

Then he gets up from his keg, takes aim real careful-like and heads toward an alley. When he gets lined up so he's almost sure of hittin' it dead center, he turns his head and says to me:

"Goo'-by, ol' son-of-a-gun. Remem'er me kin'ly if yuh remem'er me a-tall."

And then he hits square down that alley, weavin' like a snake in a cactus patch.

I went back in the saloon and finds Buck and Magpie in there holdin' a conference. They kinda glare at me, but I'm past the point where a glare means anythin'.

"We're in awful shape," wails Magpie, shakin' me hard. "Ornery jist won the high-hurdles for Yaller Horse. The score is now, Paradise, ten; Yaller Horse, twenty. We ain't won a danged thing, Ike."

Just then Mike Pelley comes in, grinnin' all over.

"It looks like Paradise had a cinch in the hammer-throw," says he. "Tombstone didn't heave it more 'n ten feet, and Telescope Tolliver's twenty-five feet heave sure looks like a cinch. Pete Gonyer never saw the day he could—"

Crash! *Ker-wham!*

I was standin' at the end of the bar, and I seen a bottle of liquor sail straight for my head. I tried to dodge, hit my chin on the top of the bar and got knocked back about twenty years.

When I woke up, somebody was walkin' over me and folks are yellin'. I hears somebody say—

"Thirty-five feet—even! Horray for Pete!"

I managed to get up on my feet. Somebody is pourin' water on Magpie and Mike Pelley is goin' around pickin' up things like a chicken picks up wheat. That back bar is swept clean except that on it is a section of railroad iron attached to a chain, which has smashed the bar mirror all to —— and part of the fixtures with it.

"The score is now," announces old Testament, "Paradise, ten; Yaller Horse, twenty; Piperock, ten. C'mon boys, we're startin' in to make our mark in the world."

MAGPIE has been knocked cock-eyed, but he weaves out, tryin' to cheer. Some men never know when they've had enough. When Pete Gonyer heaved that Oregon boot through Mike Pelley's window and across that back bar, he almost disgusted me with track meets.

I wandered out through the back door, circled the town and came back to the vacant lot where they're fillin' that balloon. It's a dirty old thing. That female balloonist is there, talkin' to Dirty Shirt and Jay Bird Whittaker, while some boys are throwin' kerosene on the fire that's built in the trench under the balloon. It's fillin' up with gas pretty fast.

"I've got to have the money before I go up," says the woman. "It's the regular thing to do, don't you see?"

"Well, I reckon it's all right," says Jay Bird, and gives her a roll of bills. "Jist as soon as the a-thee-letic contest is over, I'll give yuh the word, ma'am."

Jay Bird goes trottin' back toward the track meet. This woman comes over to me and says—

"I beg your pardon, but no one is allowed near the bag, except those actually engaged in operating it."

"I sure beg yore pardon all to ——," says I. "But what is Dirty Shirt Jones doin' over there?"

"Mr. Jones," says she, "is a friend of mine."

"Tha's ri'," nods Dirty.

"And the same of which makes me *non compos mentis*, eh?"

"Abstively," says Dirty. "Goo' afternoon, Mishter Harper."

I put my chin in the air and walked away. In fact I got so —— uppity that I walked into a hitchin'-post and barked all my ribs. I managed to get back in time to see Pole Cat Perkins win the broad jump for Paradise.

That gives Paradise another ten points, and it kinda looks as if Piperock was sunk. I runs into Half-Mile, and he's kinda red-eyed.

"I'll beat you if it's the last thing I ever do," says he. "Jist lemme have at yuh for another hundred and I'll make yuh think yo're tied to a post."

"I'd sure need to be," says I. "You big hunk of rancid grease, I could beat yuh at any mark in the road."

Well, one thing brings on two, and we takes hold of each other. I got hold of his belt and got my other elbow under his chin and starts him runnin' backwards into the middle of the street. Everybody is yellin' at us to get out of the road, but we're too busy to be bothered.

I catches a glimpse of a man gallopin' toward us, and it strikes me that it's Chuck Warner. He tries to dodge us, but his foot slips and he goes sprawlin' in the dirt, while all of Paradise gathers around him, urgin' him to get up.

Then here comes Magpie Simpkins, gallopin', wheezin' like a wind-broken horse, and he stumbles past us, while a yell goes up from the Piperock gang. Magpie had won the mile run. I tripped Half-Mile and turned around just in time to have somebody from Paradise crown me with a fence picket.

I woke up over by the pump with Magpie, old Testament and Buck, pourin' water on my head, while it seemed as if the rest of the world was yellin' for somebody to do somethin'.

A delegation from Paradise comes over and kinda addresses their remarks to Magpie.

"You'll have to forfeit the five points to Paradise 'cause Ike ain't able to compete," says Jay Bird. "He ain't noways physically able to pull on that rope, and you'll either have to pull with nine men or forfeit the points."

"And the hundred yard dash will be between Yuma and Half-Mile," says Tombstone Todd. "By grab, that'll give us the meet, 'cause Yuma can sure beat Half-Mile."

I sets up and blows water out of my nose.

"Nine men, ——!" says I. "I ain't licked yet. That was Paradise that hit me on the head, and I'll show yuh how paralyzed I am."

Magpie leads me back to the crowd and ties one end of the rope around my waist. Half-Mile is tied on the other end, and in the center of that thirty-foot rope is tied a red flag. Our ten men gets on one end, and Paradise's ten men on the other. They stretches out that rope with the flag over a circle in the dust, and when Tombstone Todd shoots his gun, we try to pull the flag over on our side.

My job is to stick my heels in the dust and hang like a bulldog. And did I? How could yuh expect me to. I ain't got a bit of feelin' in my legs. Yuma Yates is standin' right behind me, and I found out afterwards that he had bet fifty dollars on Paradise.

And Yuma is to run against me in that hundred-yard dash. I know danged well I can't never run that far. I'd be lucky to crawl that far, let alone walkin'. No matter who wins the tug-of-war, there's ten points more for the hundred, which will win the meet. As the score stands now, Piperock has twenty, Paradise has twenty and Yaller Horse has twenty. The tug-of-war ain't no use as far as I can see except as a bettin' proposition, because the winner of the hundred-yard dash will decide which town wins.

Anyway, I surges back in my rope and decides to do my best. We're all set, and Tombstone shoots his gun. The judges cluster around that flag on the rope, watchin' it see-saw. First Paradise almost gets it, and then Piperock takes it away from 'em.

About that time I discovers that there has been quite a lot of bettin' goin' on. It's also evident to my wanderin' senses that Yaller Horse had an idea that Paradise would win. Yuma Yates yells in my ear:

"Look out fer me, you bow-legged anteater! It's the first time I ever got a kickin' chance at yuh, Ike, and it's too good to lose."

With all that yellin', I know danged well I'm the only one that hears Yuma's verdict. If you think it's any easy matter to keep yore mind on pullin' when somebody behind yuh has promised to kick yuh real hard, just try it. By golly, I can't even begin to concentrate.

"Hold fast, Piperock!" yelps Testament. "Right is might in this case, and we're right! Down with the Phillistines!"

Whap! I got it. But I'm so near paralyzed in my hind quarters that it don't make much impression except to make me goshawful mad. Yuma almost lifted me loose from the dirt, and it made me so mad that I turned plumb around in my rope, caught his next kick in mid-air and got him by the legs.

Ornery Olsen seen that I kinda had Yuma foul, so he grabs Yuma's shoulders and begins tryin' to take him away from me.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back. I feels the rope sag to me, and a big yell goes up:

"Piperock wins! Piperock wins! Yee-o-o-o-ow!"

THEN I got enough slack to climb on to Yuma, and the crowd is so thick that nobody even tries to take us apart. I got both of my arms around him, wraps both of my legs around his legs and proceeds to butt him in the chin with my head. It's foul fightin', but Yaller Horse don't *sabe* the fair kind. They think yo're weak-kneed if yuh don't butt, gouge, kick and bite.

I hears a lot more yellin', and several fellers falls over us. The rope almost jerks me off Yuma, but I hangs on like a leech. Somebody is yellin' for everybody to look out, but I've got all I can handle in teachin' Yuma Yates to be a gentleman at all times and in all kinds of places.

Then I hears a rattlin' noise, somebody screams and then that rope yanks me plumb off the ground, still clingin' to my prey. I got an upside down view of Paradise, and she seems to be droppin' away from me. A rope swings past me, and I look down at the agonized face of Half-Mile, his legs swingin' in the breeze.

Then I manages to twist my head enough to look up at that balloon. Just above me is one of them big stakes which they used to anchor the ropes with. It's about six feet long and, as near as I can tell, our rope is looped over both ends of it and around the rope that leads up to the balloon.

I can see that there's a person on the little cross-bar just below the big gas-bag, but they're a long ways up from us. I can look down into Yuma's face, and he's sure a scared *hombre*.

"Can yuh hang on to me for a minute?" I yells at Yuma.

He kinda nods as if he wasn't sure. But I takes a chance and manages to buckle his belt around mine. The wind is sure blowin' real hard up there, and Paradise is a little huddle of doll houses.

"We're gone," says Yuma. "Now I lay me down to sleep."

"If you go to sleep, I'll cut yuh loose," I tells him. Just then our rope begins to slip and we're goin' down, while Half-Mile comes up. As he goes past, he says—

"My ——, wasn't I high enough already?"

It was jist like a Paradiser to complain. We dangles there in the breeze, with me lookin' up, when I sees the balloon person drop loose.

Right down she comes, headin' straight for me, just pickin' the right time, when my rope is swinging away out behind the balloon. I shut my eyes, because I figure I'm about to be landed on, when I hears a sort of a pop, a rippin' noise, and I'm smothered under a lot of canvas, which envelopes me and Yuma.

At first I figures that the balloon has collapsed and we're fallin' back to earth, but there ain't no rush of wind. I got out my knife and rips a hole in that canvas, big enough to get my head through.

Down below me, hanging on to a little trapeze, which swings out behind us like the tail of a kite, is Dirty Shirt Jones. He looks up at me as solemn as an owl, and I can see his lips workin', but he ain't sayin' a word.

Off to the east of us is Piperock, and I can see some wimmin and dogs out in the street lookin' up at us. We're only about two hundred feet high now, and goin' like ——, headin' for the hills.

I ducks my head under the canvas and yells in Yuma's ear—

"That was Dirty Shirt!"

He don't know what I'm talkin' about. He's got his arms and legs wrapped around my legs, and I can see that his lips are movin' in prayer. It's almost worth dyin' to see a feller like Yuma Yates offerin' a prayer. Our belts are stretched as far as they'll go, and I remember that it ain't so long ago that I sewed my belt-buckle with twine-string.

That darned rope has almost cut me in two, packin' the weight of Yuma Yates, and kinda annexin' Dirty Shirt and his parachute didn't relieve the tension any. I feels a tuggin' on that canvas, so I sticks my head out again and looks down.

Dirty Shirt has started climbin' up the ropes, and I don't blame him a bit. We're swayin' close to the top of the hills now, and just ahead of us is a herd of cattle. There must 'a' been about five hundred head of wild range stock lookin' at somethin' they never seen before.

I looked up at the balloon, and it sure is actin' queer. A few minutes ago it was a big, round balloon, goin' fast and free, but now she's a collapsed-lookin' object, and if I ain't misjudgin' things, she's headed for terry firmy just about as fast as she can go.

Dirty's little swing is danglin' free now,

and Dirty is up where he can cling to the bottom of that parachute.

"Help! Help! Help!" he yells.

I dunno who in —— he is expectin' help from. We're so close to the ground that I can see the eyes of them panicky cows.

And then we hit bottom. Dirty's little trapeze hooked over the horns of a big red steer, and the yank busted my belt.

I landed on my feet and stayed right side up long enough to see that balloon envelope about half a dozen wild-eyed range steers, and then somethin' yanked me upside down. I hit the dirt and started bouncin' around among them cows, which was runnin' and bawlin', tryin' to find sounds within 'em to tell how darned scared they was.

Then I got yanked free of the millin' herd and found myself runnin' a dead-heat with Half-Mile Smith. A rangy old roan steer has got our rope around his neck, with me on one side and Half-Mile on the other, and he's sure takin' us for a spin.

"Gug-gug-good ——! Ain't there no end to our misery?" wails Half-Mile, just hittin' the dirt at ten second intervals.

There was. That steer whirled sharp at the edge of a gully, and went back the other way. In fact, he whirled so sharp that me and Half-Mile kept right on goin' over the edge. I landed in the top of a balsam fir, and I stripped every branch off the thing on my way down to earth.

As soon as I got my breath back again I took out my knife and sawed that rope in two. I feel that I've aged a lot since I suffered that rope to be tied around me. Yuh must remember I only had on underclothes when the shindig started, and just now I finds that I'm wearin' a two-piece suit, or what was once that kind of a garment.

I got out of the brush and started up the gully. Somehow, it seems familiar around there. Half-Mile comes pokin' out of the brush, still draggin' the rope. He's still got the neckband and one sleeve of his runnin' costume on, but he don't mind bein' in the rough.

"Wh-wh-what's the nun-next race?" he asks.

"The human race," says I. "It's the only one I'll ever enter again. Where do yuh feel the worst, Half-Mile?"

"All around here," says he, gesturin' wide-like. "What in —— makes the world go around so fast, stranger? Do yuh reckon somethin' has gone wrong with the machinery?"

"Yo're livin' in a fast age, Rip Van Wrinkle," says I, and starts up the gully.

Half-Mile plods along behind me, draggin' his rope.

AND it's just then that I see somethin' that makes my heart, liver and lights jump with joy. There's a prospect hole on the side of a little slope, and against the pile of dirt is half of a case of Three Star.

It's the lost mine, no longer lost. Half-Mile sets down beside me and I uncork a bottle for him. Half-Mile has to kinda look over his left shoulder in order to swaller, but he gets it down all right.

I find that the gun in my shoulder-holster has knocked all the meat off my ribs, but I've still got the gun. I put it on the ground beside me, defyin' the world. Then cometh an interruption in the shape of a red steer, its horns tangled up in that parachute jigger, draggin' the parchute canvas.

It comes right down the gully and stops a few feet away, its legs braced. That poor steer is so scared and so tired that it can't go any farther.

"Who-o-o-oa, dad dern yuh, who-o-o-oa!" wails a voice.

We look up at the rim of the gully, and here comes Yuma Yates. He acts like he was leadin' a parade. His head is up and he's lookin' straight ahead, his expression kinda fixed.

Then he steps right off the edge and does a nose-dive into a wild rosebush six feet below.

"Ree-queese-e-cat in paces," says a voice, and we turn to see Dirty Shirt Jones, crawlin' out from inside that canvas, while the steer leans against the bank and does its best to not get scared of anythin'.

Dirty goes over, kicks the steer in the ribs, unhooks the rope and comes staggerin' down to us. Yuma crawls out of the bush and assumes a standin' position.

"My ——!" says he kinda awe-struck. "We went high and far. Pa used to say that it was in a Yates to go high and far, but I never knowed what he meant before."

We had split the last two quarts between us, when Magpie, Mike Pelley and Tombstone Todd rides up on the edge of the gully and contemplates us.

"We follered the balloon," says Magpie.

"To bring yuh back," says Mike Pelley.

"To run that hundred yards," says Tombstone.

"And to kill Dirty Shirt for stealin' the balloon," says Mike Pelley.

Half-Mile clears his throat. That's about all he's able to do. Then he says:

"That race has been run, gentlemen. The course was from where the balloon landed to here. Ike Harper, first; Half-Mile Smith, second, and Yuma, third. Time—" Half-Mile squints at the sun—"about ten-thirty."

"It ain't authentic," protests Mike Pelley. "Half-Mile, you darned traitor, don'tcha realize that we need them ten points to win? They'll hang yuh when yuh get back to Paradise."

"And they'll hang you in Yaller Horse, Yuma," says Tombstone. "We need them ten points."

"Then we'll all stay in Piperock," says Half-Mile. "Go back and tell 'em."

"Gosh dang it!" wails Mike Pelley. "Whatcha goin' to do in a case like this?"

"Keep yore mouth shut, you and Tombstone," says Magpie. "Last night I heard Mike talk to that balloon female, and it was worth hearin'. Mike gave her a hundred dollars to pay for the loss of the balloon and to keep her from bein' killed in a parachute that might not open. Mike is to meet her in Granite tomorrow afternoon.

"And then I heard Tombstone make a date to meet her in Curlew tomorrow afternoon, and he gave her a hundred to pay for the balloon and to keep her from death in a parachute that don't open. The lady left this mornin' for Silver Peak, where her husband is waitin' for her to dispose of an old balloon which they was all through usin'."

"Now," continues Magpie, "I reckon that race has been run and Piperock wins the meet, gentlemen."

"Uh-uh-uh, absolutely," groans Mike, tryin' to swaller.

"We'll swear to it," nods Tombstone. "Yuh can come home when yuh want to, Yuma. You done yore dangdest."

"And there's nothin' agin' yuh, Half-Mile," says Mike. "We witness that you was glorious in defeat. Good day, gents."

Mike and Tombstone rides away, never even lookin' back, while Magpie comes down to us. Dirty Shirt's active eye has sure covered a lot of territory durin' Magpie's exposure of Mike and Tombstone. Now he wipes his lips and says:

"Feller sufferers, I've been an awful fool. They say that confession is good for the soul. I didn't have no hundred dollars. She said she'd never been up in a balloon in her life, but she was doin' this for her brother, who is sufferin' in a hospital, because they needed the money so bad.

"Rather than to see her killed, I agreed to steal the darned balloon durin' the track meet, and I had a date to meet her tomorrow afternoon in Pinnacle City if the parachute opened."

Magpie nods kinda solemn-like and looks at the pile of torn canvas where the big painted letters still show—

W. A. REWIN

"Appropriate," says Magpie. "Wreck and ruin. But it's an ill wind that don't blow somebody good. Piperock won the track meet."

"She was beautiful," says Dirty. "Awful beautiful."

"But as false as store teeth," says Magpie, kinda sighin'.

We cut up that parachute, made us each a breech-clout to cover our shame and pilgrimed back to Piperock. The folks ain't back yet to greet their ten-point winner, but it's just as well.

Me and Magpie goes up to our shack, where I gives myself a horse-liniment bath and goes to bed. But before I went to sleep I got to wonderin', so I asked Magpie—

"Cowboy, where was you when Mike Pelley and Tombstone Todd was makin' their dates and payin' money to that female?"

"This ain't for publication," says Magpie, grinnin'. "I had been borrowin' a hundred dollars and was to meet her at her room in the Paradise hotel, but she wasn't there. When I hears her comin' down the hall, talkin' to Mike Pelley, I crawled under the bed.

"Mike ain't no more than gone away from there when Tombstone cometh. And when she went out huntin' for me, I pulled my freight. I was to meet her tomorrow afternoon in Mica. The depot agent told me she bought her ticket to Silver Peak."

"It's a great country, this West," says I. "Where men are men and wimmin are balloonists."

"And parachutes don't always open, Ike."

A Manifest Destiny

A Five-Part Story
Part II

by

Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Porto Bello Gold," "Swain's Folly," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IN THE early 'fifties San Francisco seemed civilization's ultimate camping-ground. People the world over were flocking to the city of gold. Transportation was difficult in those days; the overland route was dangerous. The railroad across Panama was tedious and expensive. Most people preferred the canal and railway transit through Nicaragua.

The firm of Morgan Garrison had wrested control of the Nicaragua transit from Commodore Vanderbilt, and Colonel William Walker, the famous Sonora filibuster, was about the town talking of the "manifest destiny" of the United States to annex Central American territory.

To this town came young Peter Corlaer Ormerod of the New York law firm of Ormerod and Van Ruysdyck, attorneys to the Commodore. He bore a warning and ultimatum from his client to Garrison.

He walked up to a cabby who was busily reading "Pickwick Papers."

"Take me to a good hotel," he said, "but first stop by at the offices of Garrison."

"Aha, Ormerod," said the cabby, and, looking up Ormerod recognized Fletcher Cabot whom he had known at Harvard.

Fletcher drove Ormerod to Garrison's and was told to wait. The cabby called on Colonel Walker, advising him that Ormerod was at Garrison's, whither Walker immediately went. The filibuster arrived in the midst of a discussion between Ormerod and Garrison about the situation in Nicaragua. To Ormerod, it seemed from his discussion of the matter that Walker knew the history and situation there from beginning to end.

Walker took Ormerod to Duval's, where he lived. There he introduced him to three of his aids: Tom Jenkins, the Viscount de Morbecque, and Captain von Ritterstein. Later Walker expelled two spies of the Nicaragua Legitimist Party from the bar at Duval's. These were an American and an Englishman, Spencer and Webster.

Walker and Ormerod went to dinner, where they met Don Jaime and Señorita de Avila, exiles from Nicaragua, nobles of the democrat party, which Walker favored. Ormerod learned that Walker was preparing for a filibustering campaign in Nicaragua to colonize the state and reestablish the democratic party. Walker offered Ormerod a place on his staff.

"I cannot accept until I have completed my business for the Commodore," said the lawyer, "but after that I shall consider it."

That night Ormerod heard cries in the street, as if of some one attacked. Rushing to the vicinity of the shouting, he discovered that Spencer and Webster were attacking Don Jaime and the señorita. Before he could drive them off they managed to wound him in the shoulder, and to knock Don Jaime senseless.

They carried Don Jaime to his rooms and sent for Walker who treated his wounds. Along with his other accomplishments, Walker was no mean physician.

Shortly afterward Ormerod set eastward by the Overland route.

"Will you write to me?" he asked the señorita before he left.

"Yes, my friend," she answered.

ON HIS way to New York he decided definitely that when he had closed his business with the Commodore he would join the force in Nicaragua. His resolution was strengthened when he arrived at home by a letter from the señorita.

"Cabot said that you should be one of us," it read, "I told him that *you were*."

VANDERBILT was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, with his feet on a large table strewn with papers, as Ormerod entered the private office. His face was turned toward a window through which were visible the tree-tops of Bowling Green and a fragmentary vista of Beaver Street across the way. Over the housetops the line of South Street was traced by the raking spars of the shipping. The financier's jaws moved rythmically in a determined assault upon a sailor's-size "chaw" of plug-cut; his eyes were fixed in a dreamy stare; the harsh, aggressive lines of his features were softened and subdued, his thin lips parted in expectation. Without looking around, he made a slight gesture with one hand.

"Hold still, Lambert! There's a cat out there makin' the best stalk on a bird I ever seed—'minds me of Dan'el Drew, jumpin' a ripe sucker. Aaa-aah, got him! That's life, Lambert. Don't you let any holyjoe tell you 'tain't. Jump or you git jumped."

He swiveled lazily around, and brought his bold, compelling eyes, beneath their heavy, dark over-thatch of brows, to bear upon Ormerod. In an instant he was out of his chair, hand extended.

"May I be cussed to China! By the little blue—— that sets on the safety-valve! Boy, I'm —— glad to see you. Told old 'Tut-tut' t'other day I'd pretty soon go out and git you, myself, if Miss Lyddy didn't. Haw-haw-haw! Growed another inch, ain't you? Injun-color, too. Say, I wish I could have had them arms and shoulders of yours in the days I was ferryin' to Staten Island. You're wasted in a law-office, Pete—ought to be an out-door man, you ought. Give you one of my steamers, one of these days, what say? But come on in. Shut the —— door behind you. Let's set and talk dirty. Take your coat off—take your shirt off, if you want to. Have a drink?"

Ormerod breasted the storm of words, hauled a chair forward, stripped his coat and accepted the drink.

"I had a whiff of something like this on your stairs," he remarked. "Was a man named Spencer in here to see you, Commodore?"

A mask-like impassivity settled upon Vanderbilt's face.

"Yep," he said briskly. "Sylvanus H. Spencer."

He flipped up a card on the table in front of him.

"He's a bad actor," returned Ormerod. "I ran across him in San Francisco. Last time I saw him I puddled his face properly."

And he launched into the story of his last night's adventure in the City of Gold. Vanderbilt heard him out in silence.

"So you got in with this fellow, Walker?" observed the Commodore. "How'd he strike you?"

"He's very much of a man."

"He's got guts, yes," conceded Vanderbilt. "And from all accounts he's tied up with this de Avila and the Democrats—your story bears out what the *Herald* printed this morning."

"No doubt about it," assented Ormerod. "And as I told you, Spencer and this accomplice of his, Webster, are Legitimist spies."

"Legitimist or Democrat, it's all one to me," retorted the Commodore. "And both of 'em will jump for American greenbacks."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, Pete. I ain't intendin' to lie awake nights worryin' about Nicaragua and who runs her—'cause if I succeed in what I'm already in a fair way to do *I'm* goin' to run Nicaragua."

"How are you succeeding in your stock-drive?" Ormerod asked curiously, wanting to see if the Commodore would bear out the statements others had made to him.

"We're goin' strong, boy. It takes time to comb a wide market, but the stock is comin' in—in driblets, fives and tens, and now and then a batch of fifties or hundreds. But we're scummin' the kettle week by week. I'll give Morgan and Garrison till the first of the year. And that reminds me: how about Garrison? Did he scare?"

"Not for a cent," rejoined Ormerod promptly, and he proceeded to detail his interview with the steamship magnate.

Vanderbilt nodded shrewdly at several points.

"That's Garrison," he admitted at the end. "I'm here to tell you, he's a —— of a big man—'most as big as I am, Pete." This was stated as naïvely as Walker's assertions of destiny. "Did you check up on what he said about a railroad?"

"Absolutely, sir. I didn't meet a man whose opinion was worth anything who could see it as practicable. They all want it, but it isn't within the bounds of reason.

As for the country—well, Commodore, I came through the South Pass of the Rockies after the snow was out, and I don't see how the emigrants drive their wagons across. The prairies are empty; no population to serve, no freight to move, no fuel to burn, and the Indians crazy for iron and scalps."

Vanderbilt nodded, with a return of the dreamy expression he had worn in watching the cat stalking the robin.

"It'll be a long time afore there's any money in transcontinental roads, boy; but folks'll build 'em just the same. Don't you make any mistake about that. I've quit sayin' things can't be done. Look at me! When I was young steamboats was inventions of the devil, and real religious folks wouldn't ride in 'em. Now, by ——, they go everywhere, they've got the mail time down to a third and a quarter what it was—and the railroads are buildin' thousands of miles of track a year."

"The Middle West is overbuilt," interjected Ormerod. "I satisfied myself on that score coming East from St. Louis."

"Overfinanced, you mean," corrected Vanderbilt.

"Well, yes. But anyway, there'll be a crash soon. Too much money in unproductive roads."

The Commodore spat impressively.

"Pete, I'm proud of you," he announced. "You sure are a likely pupil. I'll tell you, now, what I'm not tellin' every one, that there's liable to be fireworks in a year or so. But 'tain't goin' to hurt me."

His huge nose wrinkled in a grin.

"The big money's in steamships right now. When the English made —— fools of 'emselves and got into this Crimean War I turned in and picked off most of the Cunard's business—and more, besides. We're coinin' money. All the fast freights are comin' our way. And the longer they fight over there, why, the more we make."

"But what about Nicaragua?"

"The Transit? It can be a gold mine."

"That's what George Law said," Ormerod exclaimed involuntarily.

"Huh?"

And Ormerod repeated his conversation earlier in the morning. Vanderbilt rubbed his chin reflectively.

"That's Live-oak George," he said. "He can smell the money, but he's always a little inclined to play there's a Napoleon somewhere's in the pictur'. If 'tain't himself, Pete, its got to be somebody else."

"Well, suppose Walker succeeds and conquers Nicaragua?" insisted Ormerod.

"I might say, 'Suppose he don't!'" derided the Commodore. "But I won't. What if he does? He'll still have to have Americans to fight for him, won't he? And arms and ammunition to fight with? And mebbe tools and machinery? Huh? And what about capital? If a country's worth developing, boy, you got to have capital to do it with. Leastways, that's my experience. Is it yours?"

"Oh, you are right, of course."

"Ah! Of course! And that's where the man that controls the Nicaragua Transit comes in, with his little steamers."

"Suppose Walker buys steamers for himself?"

Vanderbilt spat again.

"Now, you're just dreamin', Pete. Steamers cost money. Most anybody can have a war and get up an army. But you've got to have hard cash to buy steamers—and the market's pretty narrow. No, sir, I never seed the time yet that money didn't run the show."

Despite himself, Ormerod was baffled by the Commodore's attitude—baffled and also somewhat disgruntled.

"Are you going to fight Walker?" he demanded.

"Fight him? Great Jehoshaphat, no! Why should I? What's he got that I want? Him with his thirty-seven men!"

"Well, then, I don't see what you are doing with this man, Spencer."

The Commodore's mouth tightened.

"Spencer ain't pretty to look at—"

"No," said Ormerod hotly, "he's a cheap assassin."

"Say," asked Vanderbilt, "are you linin' up with Walker? Or are you my lawyer? What about it, Pete?"

"I'm—I can't stand having a cur like that around!"

"Oh, so that's it!" Vanderbilt pursed his lips. "You ain't got any cause for worry, then. Spencer ain't goin' to be 'round here a-tall. He's headin' straight back for Nicaragua."

"With a wad of your money in his pocket?"

"Not too much. I don't aim to overpay his sort."

"Are you going to trust him?" There was bitterness in Ormerod's tones. "He'd just as soon sell you out."

"Nope. I'm payin' him better than any one else."

"But he's a Legitimist. The Democrats—"

"I don't give a good —— for the Democrats or the Legitimists," roared the Commodore. "What I'm payin' Spencer for is to watch things for me, and do whatever he can in my interest."

Ormerod shook his head disgustedly.

"It's a dirty business, Commodore, and that's flat. I don't like it. A rascal that will attack an old man and a girl!"

The Commodore leaned over and poked a blunt forefinger in his ribs.

"You ain't had much to say about the gal, Pete. Looks suspicious! If you go to makin' trouble because I've hired me a Bowery loafer for a spy 'stead of a bright young feller like you from Harvard College, mebbe I'll have something to tell Miss Lyddy. And say—" he became serious—"I'm not disputin' what you tell me about Spencer. The fact is, I don't much care. He comes to me well recommended for what I want. As far as himself goes, he comes from a family even you Ormerods and van Ruysdycks couldn't sneer at."

"So he says!" barked Ormerod.

"Oh, no, he don't," returned Vanderbilt serenely. "He doesn't know I had him looked up."

That forefinger wagged admonitorily.

"He's a son of John Canfield Spencer, who was Secretary of War, yes, and of the Treasury, under Tyler. He's no ordinary corner bummer."

"That's no recommendation for me," snapped Ormerod. "For if he is the person you claim him to be, he is likewise the brother of Midshipman —— Spencer, who was hung at the yardarm of the Somers frigate in '42, the only American naval officer ever executed for mutiny. ——, I'm not surprized!"

The Commodore was undisturbed.

"I'd forgotten that," he admitted. "It shows there must have been bad blood in the family, hey? But I don't see it disqualifies Spencer for my purposes. You know, Pete, you act like you thought I ought to send *you*."

Ormerod scowled.

"I hope some decent Americans will go to Nicaragua if many of Spencer's stamp are going," he said.

"We'll send Live-oak George," leered Vanderbilt. "The Spaniards wouldn't fight him. Mebbe the Nicaraguans will. Now, you run along, boy. I've got to see some Englishmen that want to be relieved of a piece of money I need. You did me a —— good job on your trip. I thought I had the right lay, but I couldn't be sure without you'd looked things over. That's the worst of bein' a big man, Pete. You've got to stay put, and if the fellers you hire to work for you don't pull their weight you've got to fight blind."

As Ormerod slipped on his coat the Commodore called after him!

"I'm going 'round to tell Miss Lyddy what a great traveler you are, rescuin' gals and such."

V

THE evening was still and sultry; black thunderheads were piling themselves above the Palisades in the west; northward, jagged streaks of lightning were ripping down into the Harlem woods. Riding up Broadway, Ormerod experienced a profound sense of depression. How dull his prospects appeared by contrast with the rapid sequence of adventures contained in the last four months! Already his feet were treading the worn groove of colorless activities; within a week, he foresaw, the past would have faded to a measurable semblance of an old man's youthful memories. He must seek excitement in the execution of mortuary settlements, interpleadings, contractural snarls and all the intellectual perversions of the law. For the first time in his life his profession inspired him with disgust. Why, he and old Dick and their kind were no more than adroit tools in the hands of doers like the Commodore—and Walker.

In his mind's eye Ormerod compared Walker and Vanderbilt, protagonists of philosophies as separate as the poles. Where find a pair more dissimilar in birth, in breeding, in background, in conception of the meaning of life, in habits, in theories of conduct and action—in all save the drive of mutually inordinate ambitions? Walker, a cultured gentleman, refined in his tastes, product of the Southern aristocracy, withal a medievalist, a throwback to some Scottish condottieri of du Guesclin's day, wholly

military, an apostle of armed force as the engine of progress. Vanderbilt, crude, uneducated, poorly born, a natural evolution from present day conditions, spokesman of the rising oligarchy of financiers, strategist in dollars. Both fearless, both—according to their lights—honest, both sublimely egotistical! If they clashed, which should win?

The cab rattled into Washington Square as the first drops of the storm were falling and the thunder was commencing to boom low over the roofs up Greenwich way. Ormerod wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and strove to clear his brain of the doubts and fancies which cumbered it so uselessly. Here was Dick van Ruysdyck's house, dinner—and Lydia. Especially, Lydia. Women were the very devil, he reflected, somewhat callowly. Lydia was civilization, New York, the foundation of a home—a wife for some man who wanted that kind of thing. And he realized as he rang the van Ruysdyck's doorbell that he didn't want that kind of thing. He wanted, with an aching craving, the smell of the Greytown mangrove swamps, the sting of burning gunpowder in his nostrils, the uncertain future which is adventure's most potent spell. Ah, if only he didn't know what tomorrow held for him!

Lydia met him in the entrance of the walnut parlor, hand outstretched; and he admitted grudgingly that she was very lovely, lovelier than ever. Her figure, showed to advantage in one of those low sleeveless dresses, which the beautiful shoulders of the French Empress had made necessary to the women of the world—a light, cornflower fabric, accentuating the yellow glory of her hair and the candid blue of her eyes, a blue like the waters of the Tappan Zee on a windless day when the Hudson seems to rest tideless in the grip of its towering banks. And there was character in her wide brow, and determination in the square jut of her chin. She mirrored a calm strength, a placid sureness, as emphatic as the señorita's glowing vitality, Ormerod appreciated, taking her hand. The two women were as strikingly different as the Commodore and Walker.

"You are late, Peter," she said. "But then you always are."

It was like her to greet him so after such an absence, and it irritated him that he must mutter for answer a botch of excuses he had employed on many similar occasions.

"So much mail at the office—the Commodore kept me—lots to attend to—"

"Oh, I made certain you'd be late," she returned gently, "so no harm is done. Mr. Vanderbilt stopped in an hour ago, with some papers for father, and he told me you had had a most exciting time, ever so much more exciting than father thought. You must tell me all about it. Did your wound—"

"It wasn't a wound," he broke in bruskly, "just a scratch, drew scarcely any blood."

"Still, it was a wound, Peter," she insisted. "And you were fortunate that it was no worse. And I must hear about this wonderful girl you met in San Francisco and saved from the men who—"

"Did the Commodore tell you who *they* were?" Ormerod interjected grimly.

"He said they were spies of her enemies in Nicaragua. She must be very interesting. But what a dreadful life for a young girl!"

"She lives with her father, and shares his lot," said Ormerod as grimly as before. "And they both work for their country."

"Yes, it's wonderful," Lydia agreed. "Like the things you read in a Scott novel. But it does seem terrible—although I suppose if you are always used to that sort of thing—"

"The de Avilas are not adventurers," said Ormerod. "As a matter of fact, the señorita has spent most of her life in Washington or the European capitals."

"Then I am sorrier for her," said Lydia simply. "I hope you will tell me more of her story some time, Peter—when you are up at the Manor, perhaps. And about Mr. Walker, too, and all the rest of it. I know you had a perfectly thrilling trip, but—"

She hesitated, and her blue eyes studied him with an effect of unplumbed depths.

"—it must have been very unsettling, I think."

"It was," returned Ormerod.

She dropped her hand on his arm.

"Well, we will talk about that some other time, too. You can't stay unsettled in New York, Peter. All young men are the better for hard work, as father says. Hard work and regular hours. That's what I told Mr. Vanderbilt. 'Peter's like a young bird that's hopped out of the nest,' he said

in that funny way of his. 'The world looks different to him, and he feels like he'd fly all over, 'stead of goin' home. But the main thing is, he *is* home, and we've got to keep him there.' "

"Humph," growled Ormerod. And to change the subject, "Who is that man talking with Mr. Greeley?"

They had crossed the threshold into the parlors, and she followed his glance toward the grayish ruff of beard which set off the editor's pink skull. Beside him stood a lean, hawkbeaked, young man with legs astraddle and a bored expression on his face as he inclined a reluctant ear to Greeley's diatribes.

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Lydia, "Mr. Greeley is started again on Kansas, I'm afraid, and that seems to be a sealed book to all Englishmen—Lieutenant Salmon is a naval officer, Peter. He's over here buying stores for the Crimea. Mr. Vanderbilt introduced him to us."

"I don't like his looks," said Ormerod.

"He's very nice. Come! You shall meet him. And Mr. Greeley has been asking for you ever since he arrived."

If Salmon was relieved by the interruption he concealed his feelings, acknowledging Ormerod's introduction with the same supercilious indifference he had shown for Greeley.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Ormerod! How d'ye do, sir?'

But the editor of the *Tribune* pounced upon Ormerod with a rataplan of questions, abrupt, staccato, belligerent.

"Well, well, so Ulysses has returned? They tell me you are *au courant* with this —— filibustering, Ormerod? Know this fellow, Walker, eh? Had some intercourse with him? In San Francisco, wasn't it? Did you hear anything about Kinney, the man who sailed from here for Nicaragua? And you met de Avila—used to be Minister at Washington? Yes, yes, I remember him well. Clever, but unpractical, I fear. Any man's unpractical who commits himself to filibustering—nothing but slavery propaganda, that's all. Found it so, didn't you? I'm told the Slavocracy is behind all these expeditions, eh? Anything to add new territories for slave states—right, ain't I? They see themselves beaten in Kansas, even though they control the president and Congress, and they seek new sources of power. That's it, my boy. You saw it, of course?"

Ormerod shook his head.

"I can't say I did, Mr. Greeley. Walker's force is as representative of the North as of the South. His expedition simply represents the restlessness of the pioneers who find California too tame for them."

"Don't believe it," exploded the editor. "It's a deliberate attempt to pack Congress with slave senators, now the South sees that the West is to be kept free."

Lydia spoke up.

"But surely, Peter, there is enough land in the West, let alone excitement, for any one, isn't there? Why should Americans go to Central America when all the Mexican conquests and Oregon are waiting for them, and the Indians are still to be subjected?"

Ormerod started to answer, but Salmon took the words out of his mouth.

"That's the worst of you Yankees, Miss van Ruysdyck," drawled the Englishman, "you're never satisfied. You bulldoze our people into givin' you land the Hudson Bay Company colonized, you bully poor Mexico into surrendering her best provinces, and then, by George, you start out to clean up Central America. Where is it going to stop?"

"It will stop when we have reached the boundaries Providence and our capacities have set for us," Ormerod replied coldly.

"You are past those boundaries, now," said Salmon. "There are hundreds of thousands, very nearly two million square miles, I dare say, in your interior, which you haven't colonized, and won't colonize in the next century or two."

"Leave it to the slavers, sir," fumed Greeley. "They would import population from Africa."

"Perhaps," agreed Salmon with a shrug. "One finds it difficult to comprehend your political theories. You seem to go ahead on a hit-or-miss system according to the spirit of the moment. But however that may be, I am certain you will not find the rest of the world complaisant to an imperialistic policy aiming at the conquest of independent Latin-American countries."

"It is not the custom of Americans to consult the rest of the world as to their intentions," retorted Ormerod. "We have a mission to humanity—"

"To enslave the blacks and exterminate the Indians?" thrust the Englishman.

"A good hit," applauded Greeley.

"No, sir," answered Ormerod, "whatever the errors in our national existence, I

speak with moderation when I say that our influence as a people upon the world has been greater and more beneficent than that of any other country, including your own."

A powerful hand thumped down on Ormerod's back, and the lusty voice of George Law resounded through the room.

"That's proper American talk! By the eternal, Ormerod, your trip did you good. I wish we could send every young fellow out to sample what our enterprise is doing, and teach 'em what back-numbers the Europeans are today. England!" He glared at Salmon. "Don't talk to me about England! Why don't you take care of your Irishers at home, sir, instead of sending 'em over here to raise —— and breed Papists? Settle Ireland first. —— knows you've had enough time to do it! Then teach us how to settle the countries destined to flourish under the best brand of civilization an imperfect world ever knew."

"Permit me to differ with you, Mr. Law," rejoined Salmon, turning away.

"Hear, hear," exclaimed Greeley. "Law, I'm ashamed of you. You Knownothings are a national disgrace."

Ormerod became aware of the pressure of Lydia's fingers upon his arm.

"Don't let's dispute any more," she said. "Dinner is waiting—oh, yes, and Peter hasn't yet met Mr. Law's friend. Colonel Henningsen, Peter—another Englishman."

Ormerod stared into a pair of unwinking, frosty blue eyes, and gripped a sinewy hand. Henningsen was six feet tall, spare and muscular, his thirty years exaggerated by a long brown beard. He carried himself with the alertness of the professional soldier.

"We must talk together, Mr. Ormerod," he said pleasantly. "Mr. Law has told me of you."

"At the table, then," admonished Lydia. "Peter, you are to take me in. I am sorry there are no other ladies, gentlemen, but this is midsummer."

VI

HENNINGSEN, Ormerod perceived with satisfaction, was seated on his right hand. He discovered an instinctive attraction for the bearded Englishman, as pronounced as his dislike of the naval officer opposite.

"Are you over here for your War Office, Colonel?" he inquired.

"No, sir," replied Henningsen, smiling. "I am not that kind of a soldier. I had my rank of Don Carlos in Navarre."

"Oh, you are not in the English service!"

"No, Mr. Ormerod, I have served in several armies, but never, as it has chanced, in my own country's. I held a commission from the Czar during the Circassian campaign, and I was with Kossuth in the final phases of the Hungarian revolution. In fact, it was with him I came to America."

"Shall you stay here?"

Henningsen's strong white teeth flashed through the tangle of his beard.

"I could hope so, sir. I overheard your argument in the parlor, and if a stranger may presume to intrude his opinion, let me say that I enjoyed your point of view. I have traveled a great deal, but I have yet to visit a country which attracted me so much as the United States. My wife is a native of Georgia, and I have already taken steps to establish citizenship."

"You will find it dull here," returned Ormerod. "I should fancy that after a life of adventure our eastern states would not afford very much excitement for you."

"Very possibly," Henningsen agreed. "To be precise, it was on that score I wished to speak with you. Mr. Law told me you knew something of the filibustering enterprise of Colonel Walker in Nicaragua. Do you expect him to accomplish anything?"

It was Ormerod's turn to hesitate.

"That is a difficult question to answer," he said. "Personally, I was impressed with Colonel Walker, but he embarked with ridiculously inadequate forces and resources, and if he does accomplish anything it must be in the face of difficulties which would justify any one in refraining from joining fortunes with him."

"Difficulties mean little to the born leader," rejoined Henningsen. "I have been looking into the question of Central America, and wholly aside from whatever Colonel Walker may intend, it impresses me as a field for military endeavor. In the existing chaos down there a handful of determined men might shift the course of history."

"You talk in Colonel Walker's vein," exclaimed Ormerod.

"I had an idea we thought alike," smiled Henningsen. "From what little has appeared in the public prints he impresses me as the kind of man I could work with. Understand me, I am not setting myself

up as a rival to his leadership. I know nothing of politics. I am a soldier."

Ormerod experienced an overpowering temptation to unburden himself of his own growing thirst for a share in Walker's enterprise.

"Look here," he said, "I feel the way you do. I'm not a soldier. I'm not even a good shot. I'm—I'm—I guess I'm just a fairly husky individual. But Walker offered me a place on his staff—"

"Why didn't you take it? Oh, I suppose you had to conclude your errand for Mr. Vanderbilt. But now—what's to hinder your joining him now? You are independent, are you not? You need not be bound, say, by Mr. Vanderbilt's—"

"He might not like it," said Ormerod frankly; "but there is no reason why I should consult his wishes in a personal matter. Mr. van Ruysdyck would feel it still more. I'm his partner, you see. It would throw work on him. But I've been in harness all my life, Colonel Henningsen, and you don't know how good it seems to get away from law offices and courts—or how miserable it is to get back to them."

"I have no means of realizing your sensations," admitted Henningsen, "but I know from experience how fascinating is the soldier's life. I don't see why any young man isn't improved by it." His teeth flashed through his beard again. "I am recently become a benedick, and have every reason for enjoying the comforts of home life, but frequently I crave the risk and happy uncertainty of combat and life in the open." His manner became graver. "Perhaps I should warn you, Mr. Ormerod, that a life such as I have led is most unsettling to a man's habits and disposition."

Ormerod gulped down a glass of wine.

"Unsettled!" he rasped. "That's what I want to be. Besides, what do I accomplish here? I carry on a practise my father built up. I lead a highly respectable, decent existence. Yes, that's what it is—an existence!"

For several moments neither of them spoke.

"What you have said, Mr. Ormerod—emboldens me to open a proposition I have conceived since we sat down together. For the present I am engaged in negotiating a contract with the War Department in Washington for equipping the army with Minié rifles. But I shall be free next year. If you meet Colonel Walker again I wish you would inform him that I should be pleased to join him, and bring with me a substantial contribution in the shape of weapons and equipment. I will go farther, in confidence, and add that I could probably induce one or two friends to contribute with me."

Ormerod scowled at his plate.

"To be honest," he answered, "when I sat down here I had no idea of going to Nicaragua, but I am now considering it very seriously. That Englishman across the way from us—I beg your pardon if there seems to be any racial animosity in my tones—has reminded me that his Government has tried consistently to acquire a stranglehold on the canal route. I don't know whether you are familiar with the situation—"

"Very vaguely," said Henningsen.

"Well, they lay claim to practically the entire east coast of Nicaragua on the pretense that it is an independent kingdom, ruled by a negro-Indian king—the King of the Mosquito Shore, if you please!—under their protectorate. And they fooled our Government into legalizing this claim in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. I don't go so far as your friend Mr. Law, Colonel Henningsen, but there is no doubt a large class of Englishmen are very jealous of the progress of the United States, and try to head us off in every direction."

Henningsen nodded.

"Quite so. England is an old country; the United States is a new country. Yesterday—a little of today—belongs to the old Lion. Tomorrow—a large slice of today—is the Eagle's portion. Jealousy is human, sir. But you think favorably of my suggestion?"

There was a shade of eagerness in Henningsen's voice.

Ormerod assented.

"Certainly. If there are no compromising terms attached."

"Only the provision that I shall have an opportunity of service, with rank at least equivalent to that I have held in the past."

"That seems fair," indorsed Ormerod. "And if it pleases you, you can believe that what you have said has influenced me materially to favor the idea of joining Walker."

He laughed sarcastically.

"Yes, of joining an adventurer with an army of thirty-seven men!"

"It isn't the size of the army that counts," said Henningsen earnestly. "But the man who commands it. However, take my advice, Mr. Ormerod, and do nothing precipitate. Go down to Nicaragua, if you decide you want to, and look over the situation. Then, if it appeals to you, join Walker. If it doesn't, come home. You can always reach me through Mr. Law."

There was a let-up in the general flow of conversation around the table, and Lydia addressed Ormerod.

"What are you and Colonel Henningsen discussing so seriously?"

"Nicaragua," he said curtly.

"Oh!"

Her eyes scrutinized him with a clear penetration that made him writhe, and he called to Greeley—

"I talked with a man on the ferryboat this morning who was going to see you, an Illinois lawyer named Lincoln."

"Honest Abe, the railsplitter," returned Greeley. "Yes, he came to the office."

"An unusual man," commented Ormerod.

"Nonsense, my boy! A dependable wheel-horse."

"He impressed me as possessing a very brilliant mind."

"Fiddlesticks! Don't talk twaddle, Ormerod. Abe is a middling good speaker, with an apt line of rather common stories. He appeals to the farmers."

The talk drifted off into a quarrel between Law and Greeley concerning the relative merits of the Knownothing and Republican movements, under cover of which Ormerod bent over the table toward Lydia.

"I think I shall go to Nicaragua," he said.

She regarded him unperturbed.

"I'm not surprized, Peter."

"Please don't say anything to your father. I'd rather tell him myself."

"I'll speak to him afterward," she answered. "He won't understand."

"You—you don't mind?"

"I am sorry you feel you must go. It's not the sort of thing to carry you very far. And it must be dangerous." Was that a mist in her eyes as she looked away—or only the reflection of the lights in the chandelier? "But you were never one to let others make up your mind for you."

Ormerod was secretly resentful of the calmness with which she had received his tidings, annoyed, too, by a feeling that he was being placed on the defensive.

"This sort of thing—" he gestured to include the room— "stifles me. After the frontier. I'm young, Lydia. I don't want to spend all my life being respectable, going from the house to the office, from the office to the house. It's like being a wheel biting into the same cogs, day after day, only the cogs are people."

"I suppose all people can't be stimulating," she said gently. "But a woman shouldn't try to hold a man back. If she doesn't succeed, he remembers it against her. If she does, the memory of it will always irritate him."

"There's important work to be done down there," he asserted. "Pioneering."

"And the Ormerods always were pioneers until they became lawyers." She smiled faintly. "There's roaming blood in you. That's the difference between us, Peter. The first van Ruysdyck in New Amsterdam built a house in the city, and cleared the Manor—and every van Ruysdyck since has gravitated between the city and the Manor."

Her voice died away.

"Have you spoken to Mr. Vanderbilt yet?" she asked after a pause.

"No, but I—"

"Don't quarrel with him, Peter. He likes you. If you handle him kindly he won't take offense."

"He has no right to take offense," Ormerod answered haughtily. "My going has nothing to do with his affairs, and I suppose your father can get on without me for a while. If not, the firm can be dissolved—"

She pushed away from the table with her first demonstration of feeling.

"That is foolishness," she said sharply. "Go, if you will, but why should you insist on treating your best friends as enemies?"

"If they are my friends, they can not be my enemies," he retorted.

Her placidity enfolded him in a spell that he rebelled against.

"You would quarrel, with encouragement, wouldn't you? Well, talking won't help any. And I think I shall go up-stairs. I am tired. Good-by."

"Good-night," he corrected gruffly.

"I am going up to the Manor tomorrow," she answered. "Don't underrate us stay-at-homes, Peter. We have our advantages."

Before he could reply to her she was engaged in conversation with Salmon, leading the company back to the parlors. Ormerod exchanged a few perfunctory remarks with

Henningsen and Law, said good-night to van Ruysdyck, dodged a suggestion of Greeley's that they should ride downtown together and escaped from the house. He wanted very much to be alone, puzzled by the feeling of bruised, repentant triumph which came over him. Women certainly were the very ——! You left them, asserted yourself, and they advised you how you should do it. The maternal instinct, maybe. But whatever it was, it was capable of smothering a man's self-sufficiency. The one defense against it was ruthlessness, which was distinctly disagreeable.

VII

THE Commodore dropped his feet to the floor.

"——n' brimstone! Take a holt of yourself, van Ruysdyck, or you'll bust your b'iler. I never seed such a feller for steamin'. 'Tain't as if Pete was plannin' to rob the Treasury. He's young, and he's feelin' all the wild oats he'd oughter have sowed before this. What d'you expect, anyhow?"

Ormerod watched with secret amusement as old Dick waved his arms and struggled for words.

"But without warning! Out of a clear sky, Commodore! And he's just had four months of traveling and—"

"Yes, sir, and I reckon that puts it up to me. I might have knowed a serious young feller like Pete would be jiggled up by that trip. Wouldn't be wuth the powder to blow him to ——, otherwise."

"Tut, tut, tut! You talk as foolishly as Peter, himself. Do, now, Vanderbilt, consider the subject from my position. How on earth am I to carry on the firm's business indefinitely without a partner?"

Ormerod hitched his chair forward.

"I offered to get out of the firm," he said; "but Dick won't hear of it."

"Of course not," sputtered van Ruysdyck. "Duty to his father's memory—always promised the Judge I'd keep my eye on him! Business his as much as mine."

The Commodore bit off a new chaw from his stick of pilot's plug.

"Well, Pete couldn't have offered you any more," he observed. "If that don't suit you, why can't you hire some one to take on his work? Pete would stand the screw, wouldn't you, Pete?"

"Certainly," agreed Ormerod. "I suggested that, too."

"But it's very unsettling," wailed his partner.

"Do you good to be unsettled," snapped the Commodore.

Ormerod grinned.

"That's the way I feel."

"Sure!" The Commodore was all sympathy. "Every feller has to have a little red pepper in his life. Trouble with you, Pete, is you were brought up too —— respectable. Your father was one of the finest men the Lord ever made in a generous moment, but he raised you to be *his* son, a great lawyer, an Ormerod. Worst of it was you took to his ideas like a canal-boat skipper to corn-likker. I used to watch you after you got through all that college eddication your father lined out for you, and them polite trips to Europe; and I kept a-wonderin' when you'd rear up over the traces."

He snickered.

"And that reminds me, the joke's sort of on me today, 'cause when I sent you to Californy I had a suspicion you'd bust loose out there, what with all the wild women and gamblin' folks tell about; but near as I can see you didn't do nothin' 'cept rescue a pretty little señorita and take a fall out of a couple of my hired men."

"I had one evening at *rouge et noir* to please you, Commodore," Ormerod interposed.

"Holy Jude! And you called that dissipation!"

"I called it a waste of time," answered Ormerod, shrugging his shoulders. "It didn't interest me."

"But you want to go to Nicaragua and gamble your immortal soul, mebbe, on a feller who plays Napoleon with thirty-seven lead soldiers!"

Van Ruysdyck burst in, wringing his hands:

"That's it, Commodore! Was there ever such madness? It would be different if I didn't look on Peter almost as a son."

"Never mind that," returned Vanderbilt. "Pete's free, white and twenty-one. And just like I said in the beginnin', he's entitled to his whirl at what he calls adventure or romance or any other highfalutin name. I call it a natural born itch for —— raisin', and I think all the more of him for it."

"There's the Transit," protested van

Ruysdyck. "Who can tell what complications may come from this man Walker's activities? Your interests may be affected—"

Vanderbilt swung around in his chair, facing Ormerod.

"Ain't fixin' to do me dirt, are you, Pete?"

"Certainly not. How could I?"

"Now, you're askin' the question. Bein' no mind-reader I can't answer. But I ain't worryin' much over that. Walker or any other squirt of a filibuster can have his needin's whenever he asks 'em from Cornelius Vanderbilt. Go ahead, Pete. Get this p'ison out of your system. I got it out before I was your age, sweating round the Harbor, goin' hungry, sailin' through high water that druv every sensible ferryman ashore, not knowin' what the next day held for me. That's the sort of stuff to make a man or break him. It made me. Mebbe Walker and Nicaragua can make Pete."

"He is made," protested van Ruysdyck indignantly. "I am heart-sick over this idiotic fancy of his, but there's not a harder-working or more capable young attorney—"

"Sweet ——! Who said he wasn't that?" shouted the Commodore. "I'm as good a friend as the boy has. But he needs a mite of iron into him. No man amounts to a hoot in —— till he's knowed fear. Let him be. If he's killed, we'll be sorry for him. If he comes back, he'll be wuth more than he is today."

"I'm going without any strings on me," warned Ormerod. "Not as your attorney, Commodore."

"Who said you were?" demanded Vanderbilt. "I want you to forget you know me."

He winked.

"Forget all of us respectable folks, includin' Miss Lyddy. See what you can chew off on your own. Now, don't you go to tuttin' at me again, van Ruysdyck. You'd be a better man, yourself, if you'd been a —— fool when you were young. Let the boy go. Worry over him, if you've a mind to; but let him go. If he's all you say he is, and I think, he won't come to harm. And if he gits to be the emperor of Central America, why, we can go out and crow in Wall Street 'cause we said, 'Steam into it, Pete!' "

Old Dick slumped in his chair, wobegone and disconsolate.

"I won't be responsible," he squeaked. "Feel as if my own son had abandoned me."

The Commodore dealt him a bone-jarring smack on the back.

"Cryin' won't mend it, man. I'll bet you Miss Lyddy—"

"She doesn't know. She's gone up-river—"

"I told her last night," said Ormerod quietly.

"What'd she say?" asked the Commodore with evident interest.

"Well, she didn't altogether like—"

"I'll warrant she didn't," growled van Ruysdyck.

"—like it, but she didn't say more than that. And she did say she'd speak to her father because he wouldn't understand. And—and—" Ormerod grinned shamefacedly at the Commodore— "she told me not to quarrel with you."

Vanderbilt drummed on his desk for several moments, staring out the window overlooking Bowling Green.

"You can't beat a woman for sizin' up a man's mind," he said finally. "She's a mighty fine gal, that Lyddy, mighty fine—got a heap to her. Bear watching, she will. Humph! Humph! Nothing more to be said, is there? Pete's goin', and the rest of us make the best of it. Good luck to you, boy. I know you're not workin' for me on this job, but keep the old boss in mind. *He* won't forget *you*. I hope you git to be a general, and wear as much gold lace as old 'Fuss-and-feathers' Scott at Washington."

VIII

"GOD love ye, darlin'!" sobbed Norah, flinging her arms around his neck. "I think me heart's shriveled in me breast for worritin' over ye. All thim bitter months ye was gone to the West—and now ye're off again."

She peered up at him suddenly.

"It will be the furrin woman, her that writ ye?"

"No," he denied hastily. And then, "I suppose she had something to do with it. She was new. But everything was new, Norah, different. She—Miss de Avila—" how strange the 'Miss' sounded!—"is no more responsible than— But you wouldn't understand."

"Not understand, is it?" she protested indignantly. " 'Tis me knows ye betther

nor yourself! Sure, 'tis no more than the ancient blood of thim that bred ye, a-cryin' for what ever lured thim on. Grand gentry, they were. But foreby your grandfeyther's time there was no houldin' thim. Come!"

She drew him by the hand out of the hallway into the parlors on the right side of the square-built Georgian house.

"See there," she commanded, brandishing her key-ring at the portrait of a man in Eighteenth Century dress. "The day ye was born I come downstairs from layin' out your mother, and here stood the Judge, aye, where we stand this minit. 'Tis all over, Norah,' says he, like he was sayin' the blessed Jesus was callin' us. 'The b'y's upstairs, sorr,' says I. And he nodded like he did times he had on the Black Cap—Ah, haven't I seed him and heard him, twicet, and the power on him so the condimned 'ud weep!—and looked up to that picture, and says he, 'Norah, I wonder will the ould rovin' strain come out in him?' 'Phwat's that, sorr?' says I. 'Sure,' says he, 'that's me great-great-grandfeyther, and a grand rover and fightin' man he was. And his son over yon—' " she nodded to a second portrait in the undress uniform of the Continental navy—" 'and his grandson, the Cor-r-ronel.' "

Ormerod's eyes strayed to the third picture, his own great-grandfather, who wore the uniform of the New York Line.

"Yes, they were all rovers and fighters," he agreed. "But so was my grandfather, the first lawyer. He was out in 1812."

She commenced to sob again, looking from the portrait to Ormerod.

"I might have knowed ye was over-quiet for a great, upstandin' lad. But I hoped—I thought—Ah, God be good to me—and to her—"

Ormerod patted her awkwardly, and backed into the hall.

" 'Tis yourself ye must suit," she called after him. "Only don't forget ould Norah that loved ye from the minit she swaddled ye. She'll be wearin' her two knees off prayin' for ye. Ah, holy Virgin, I misdoubt I'll ever see ye again, Misther Payter!"

"Oh, yes, you will," he promised. "Good-by, dear. Mr. van Ruysdyck will send you the money every month, and I'll write."

But now there was more sobbing than laughter in the hall, and he shut the door on her with a guilty sense of relief, and descended the steps to the cab that awaited him.

"Thank God, I haven't anybody else to say good-by to!" he muttered. And to the cabby, "To the Transit pier, steamer *Star of the West.*"

But as the cabby clucked to his horse, footsteps pounded on the sidewalk, and the brogue of Mike Gilligan hailed them.

"Hey, there! Bide a minit! Misther Orm'rod! Oh, Misther Orm'rod!"

The cabby reined in, and Mike's flat features appeared in the vehicle's window.

"They're afther tellin' me ye're goin' to the fightin' in Nicaragua. Sure, there's a foine lot of us b'ys at the firehouse would dhrop ev'rything to be wid ye."

"I couldn't take them, Mike," denied Ormerod. "I don't really know what I'm going to do, myself."

"Well, then, at the last ye could take me by me lone," wheedled Mike. "Sure, ye'll be the betther for wan that knows your ways."

Ormerod was touched.

"I would, if I could," he answered. "But we'll have to wait until I find out what is going to happen in Nicaragua. Perhaps my friends will be defeated, Mike, and I shall have to return home immediately."

"And if they're not?" pressed Mike. "If there's a rale war, wid lashin's of blood and slaughter?"

"We'll use all the boys that care to enlist," Ormerod promised lightly. "Now I've got to drive on. The steamer won't wait for me."

"That's what meself will do, then," Mike called after him. "Hurroo and hurray! Here's to war!"

BOOK III

THE smell of the Greytown mud!

Ormerod craned over the heads of a batch of his seven hundred shipmates, California-bound, and breathed in the lush scent of the jungle, heavy and sweet with the swift decay of life that leaped to flower in a night. *Splash!* went the anchor, and the *Star of the West* swung with the flooding tide lengthwise of the lagoon. To starboard lay the mainland, Greytown's thirty-odd grass-thatched huts straggling along a narrow strip of beach backed by the green jungle barrier that stretched unbroken to the central Cordillera.

This was a land untapped by civilization, inhabited by naked Indian tribes, whose natural fastnesses had resisted even the mailed Conquistadores; the Mosquito Shore, which the crafty Colonial government of Jamaica had colonized with turbulent negroes, and then assumed to erect to the status of a mock kingdom, under the protection of her Britannic Majesty, Greytown, in the nomenclature of the English traders, a free city—God save the mark! To the Nicaraguans, their lost port of San Juan del Norte. Anciently, in the days of Spanish power, San Juan de Nicaragua. Today, Ormerod reflected, a poverty-stricken negro-Indian village; but the key to the canal men talked of building when the time was ripe. And therefore the bait for which two mighty nations haggled, a stake in diplomacy and world supremacy.

He turned his back upon it, and looked across the lagoon at Punta Arenas, the sandy spit which shut off the anchorage from the waters of the Caribbean. There were the wharves, storehouses and quarters of the Transit Company, trim, angular, whitewashed structures, an age apart from the cane huts of Greytown. Sternwheel steamers were clumping out to meet the *Star of the West* to relieve her of passengers and cargo for the passage of the Isthmus; on the wharves there was a bustle of arrangement that bespoke true Yankee energy, where the waterfront across the lagoon showed a few half-clad loungers and a single *bongo* putting out with the port authorities to perform the solemn farce of inspecting the liner. One of the ship's officers stopped at Ormerod's elbow.

"Don't that beat anything?" he asked, pointing at the clumsy *bongo*. "There's nothing those people can make us do. Nobody knows what Greytown is or who it belongs to. First-off, the English annexed it to the Mosquito Shore. Then they proclaimed it a Free City, whatever that is. Then this fellow Kinney came along a couple of months ago and proclaimed himself governor for a Philadelphia land company that says the King of the Mosquitos granted it to them.

"The Health Officer is a Texas mule-dealer, who works for Kinney now. He'll come alongside, and ask the skipper if we're all right, and the skipper will say we are—and that will be all. If we weren't all right, there isn't anything he could do for us or make us do. But every voyage we go through the same performance. In the old days, when the Jamaicans ran everything, they used to try to be disagreeable, but after the Administration sent the *Cyane* down last year and shelled the dump to cinders, the troublemakers cleared out."

"If it weren't for the Transit there wouldn't be any Greytown, I suppose," agreed Ormerod.

"Not worth speaking of," said the officer, and continued about his duties.

Ormerod worked his way over the crowded deck to the port side where the sternwheelers were making fast. He had discarded his city clothes that morning, and was dressed like hundreds of the other passengers in the rough garb of the mines, blue flannel shirt, corduroy trousers, half-boots and felt hat. A Colt's pistol and bowie-knife, which Tom Jenkins had selected for him in San Francisco, were belted around his waist; he had a rifle looped to his shoulder and carried a light carpet-bag containing the remainder of his belongings. In the stark glare of the tropical sun, he, like every other man on the steamer, was bathed in perspiration.

A gangway was being rigged from the *Star of the West* to the nearest of the sternwheelers, and under the direction of a squad of sailors, the passengers were forming in column of twos on the port deck. Ormerod found a place in the coiling serpent and moved forward with it close to the rail. Idly, for want of anything better to do, he glanced down at the upper deck of the sternwheeler, where a squad of Transit employees, temporarily unoccupied, were watching the transfer—and his jaw dropped as his eyes encountered the equally idle gaze of Tom Jenkins. But it couldn't be!

He looked away to make certain of his surroundings. And when he lowered his eyes again to the sternwheeler's deck he saw not only the scout, but Cabot, who had stepped around the pilothouse and was standing at Jenkins' elbow. Yes, there was the ex-cabby, a trifle more tanned and weather-beaten, to be sure; but unescapably the same. And there was no mistaking Jenkins' gaunt face, with the puckered eyes that were perpetually vigilant.

Ormerod leaned as far over the rail as he could.

"Tom!" he called. "Cabot! What are you—"

Both looked up, plainly startled; and Jenkins interrupted his question.

"Howdy! See you later."

Not a muscle crinkled in the frontiersman's face, but he contrived to signal a warning which Ormerod understood, even as he puzzled over the presence of two of Walker's men at the eastern end of the Transit.

Why, the last report of Walker before the *Star of the West* sailed from New York located the filibuster in the far northwestern corner of Nicaragua, somewhere between Leon and the Pacific coast. And now— A shout from the top of the gangway interrupted his meditations.

"Hey, fellers, heard the news back there? Walker's grabbed the west end of the Transit. Sure! The skipper of the river-boat says he had a —— of a fight with the Legitimists at Virgin Bay on Lake Nicaragua, and licked the stuffin' out o' them. He's at San Juan del Sur, now."

A deep wave of cheering swept the liner's deck. No one need be in any doubt how the California emigrants felt on the question of Walker's presence in Nicaragua.

Jenkins and Cabot must be spies, Ormerod decided. Yes, that would be it. Having seized the western section of the Transit—by which, undoubtedly, was meant the twelve-mile metaled road extending from Virgin Bay on Lake Nicaragua to San Juan del Sur on the Pacific—Walker was planning the steps essential to possession of the remainder of the route across the lake and down the San Juan River to Greytown.

Having reasoned this out, Ormerod's curiosity was partially appeased, but he lost no time in seeking his friends the instant he set foot on the sternwheeler. They were on the watch for him, too, and as he sidled through the sweating, cursing throng Cabot's arm reached around a guy-wire and plucked at his sleeve.

"Vell, vell, Mr. Vinkle, and how did you leave the Nabob at Dingley Dell?" chuckled the Pickwickian. "Vich is to say the same as 'ow is 'is pyeratical nibs, the Commodore?"

"Fine," returned Ormerod. "You don't mean to say you've got your book with you?"

Cabot slapped a bulging hip that gave back a muffled thud.

"What the Bible was to my Puritan ancestors this is to me," he declared. "But come on over to the next boat. Tom's there. By George, it gave us a turn to see you. And you here for your boss or for us?"

"I'm going to join you, if Walker will have me," replied Ormerod.

It was a more definite answer than he would have made the previous day, but the news of the filibuster triumph had carried him off his feet.

"That's great," said Cabot warmly. "The chief will be pleased, I can tell you. We're on the road to success, but every recruit counts."

"I'm no good for anything, except obeying orders," answered Ormerod. "But tell me what you are doing—"

"Hssh!" Cabot peered around them. "We've talked too freely, as it is. Got to be careful, you know." He lowered his voice. "We're scouting things. Wanted to find out how strongly the Legitimists are holding Fort San Carlos—where the San Juan flows out of the lake, d'you remember?—and the Old Castle, by the Castillo Viejo Rapids. Those two points are the keys to the San Juan, of course. Then the Chief wanted to know, too, how Kinney was getting on here in Greytown—and we had some dispatches to send North."

"But how could you manage it?" exclaimed Ormerod. "There aren't many Americans with Walker, and I should think you'd be recognized."

Cabot winked, and laid one finger alongside his nose.

"Our good friends of the Transit force are neutral, but— After all, we are Americans, and all Americans would like to see the country run by Americans. Not hard to understand, is it?"

"No-o-o," assented Ormerod doubtfully. "But risky, I should think."

"Not at all. Tom and I are just two employees on the river-boats. To a Nicaraguan one American looks like another, and I can say the same for Nicaraguans."

They had reached the lower deck, where Tom Jenkins leaned against a stanchion, thumbs hooked in his belt.

"Howdy," he greeted Ormerod. "Didn't reckon to see you so soon."

"He's throwing in with us, Tom," said Cabot before Ormerod could reply.

The scout's grim visage twitched in what might have been a chuckle had any sound accompanied it.

"Thought you was fightin' material, Pete," he observed. "Shake."

Ormerod gripped the proffered hand, and touched his belt-weapons with the numbed fingers when they were released.

"You picked these for me," he said. "I liked the feel of them—so I came."

"Give you plenty of chances to use 'em," returned Jenkins. "I reckon Fletch done told you what we all are doin'?"

Ormerod nodded.

"If I can help—"

"Only way you kin help, Pete, is by keepin' yore mouth shet—right now. We done what we got to do. All we're after is to git back to the colonel."

"What about Kinney?" Ormerod inquired.

Both his friends grinned.

"His goose shore is cooked," said Jenkins. "The colonel kinder thought mebbe he'd git to be wuth considerin', but he ain't even frettin' the English none."

"He'll stay as long as his money lasts," agreed Cabot. "But he went at things the wrong way. This side of Nicaragua is no good, Ormerod. All the population and the valuable lands are on the Pacific side. So that's the side to win, if you want to control the country."

Ormerod chucked his carpet-bag into a corner.

"And those forts on the river Cabot was telling me about?"

"We'll take 'em when we git ready," asserted the scout.

"We aren't ready yet," admitted Cabot. "Not anywhere near."

"But I just heard that you won a fight," said Ormerod. "They were cheering on the steamer. People were saying Walker controlled the west end of the Transit."

Jenkins bit a chaw off a plug of tobacco he drew from a pocket, in sign that his companion was to answer.

"So he does," replied Cabot, nothing loath. "And it was a great fight. You see, we laid up in a place called Chinandega, in the North, to get over the drubbing we had at Rivas. We hurt the Legitimists more than they hurt us, there, but we were sore as a calf that's ridden on the cow-catcher—and we needed to recruit. We lost ten men killed, and a couple of other fellows sickened of the work. I can't blame 'em much."

"They was ornery yaller hounds," Jenkins stated impartially.

"Well, we recruited, and the end of August we sailed south again in the old *Vesta*. We had fifty-eight Americans and a hundred and thirty-six good native troops under an old Indian named Valle—Chelon, his men call him."

"And a ringding —— buster he shore is," affirmed Jenkins.

"A good man," echoed Cabot. "On September second we heard there was a force of Legitimists at Rivas who were interested in us, and the colonel decided to give them a chance for a look-see, as the Chinks say. So we marched that night to Virgin Bay along the Transit Road, arriving early the morning of the third. While we were at breakfast the Legitimists attacked with six hundred men, and if anybody tells you that Central Americans won't fight, Ormerod, you can tell 'em for me that it isn't so. They—"

"Don't know how to fight wuth a mangy elk-hide," interposed Jenkins; "but they're right smart willin'."

"They came right up to us," continued Cabot," taking our fire all the way, and our native troops stood up to it as well as we did. For a while it was a knock-down-and-drag-out business, within a hundred yards' range. They even pushed into the village, and used the bayonet on our natives. But we—"

"Did you lose heavily?" queried Ormerod anxiously.

"No, that's the funny part of it. Walker was hit by a spent ball in the throat and knocked down, and another ball cut to pieces a packet of letters in his pocket. But he was up again immediately, didn't have a scratch. And altogether, we had three men wounded fairly seriously, and our natives had two killed and three wounded. But the Legitimists lost sixty killed, about a hundred wounded. We picked up a hundred and fifty muskets on the ground."

"Cain't shoot no more'n a St. Jo storekeeper," said Jenkins. "That's their trouble. And a musk't ain't in it with a rifle, nohow."

"And since then?" asked Ormerod.

"They leave the Transit Road alone," answered Cabot. "We don't try to garrison Virgin Bay because it would be childish to divide our force; but we scour the road every few days and our lancer patrols are in and out all the time. The Legitimists stay behind their barricades in Rivas."

"Jest like the Navajos when thar's a

'Pache war-party out," grunted Jenkins.

Ormerod shook his head wonderingly.

"It's amazing," he said. "The last news I heard in New York you were smashed up after that Rivas affair. I came here expecting to join a beaten company."

"Yo're the kind o' feller we need," said Jenkins with an unusual amount of feeling.

"It will do the Chief good to see you, Ormerod," cried Cabot. "You can talk about your Vanderbilts, but there's a *man* for you. Nothing went right until this scrap at Virgin Bay, but nobody ever heard a word of complaint from him. He never lost his temper, never snapped at a fool, never denounced a knave, never grumbled at hard luck. But——knows, he needs encouragement, and when he sees you he'll know the right sort are turning toward him."

Ormerod was embarrassed.

"Oh, that's ridiculous, Cabot! I'm a liability, not an asset. Strong enough, perhaps, but I don't know anything worth while in this sort of enterprise."

"You wait," advised the ex-coachman. "The Chief can find ways to use any man. But here comes a gulchful of your argonauts. We'll have to drop political conversation."

"One more question," pleaded Ormerod. "Have you seen de Avila—and the señorita?"

Jenkins wagged his head reprovingly, and Cabot's voice dropped to a whisper.

"Least said about them the better, old chap. This is Nicaragua, you know—and their name means a lot hereabouts."

"But surely, you can—"

"I can tell you they are in Leon, yes. No, I haven't seen them since we left San Francisco. Tom has, though."

Jenkins' poker face was absolutely imperturbable. When he spoke the words dribbled almost soundlessly out of one corner of his mouth.

"Saw 'em once when I went to Leon with the colonel to talk to the director—Castellon. They're well. The old feller's over that bump. The gal's workin' hard to git us more men."

"Natives," qualified Cabot. "The Chief won't take *voluntarios forcados*—pressed men, you know. Only real volunteers, and they're not common in this country. But the señorita finds us a few. She sent down a batch of thirty-five last week."

Jenkins carefully spat his chaw overside.

"That's enough war-talk," he announced. "Pete, you come on up where it's cool, and stake yoreself a beddin' space 'longside o' us. We got a right-smart lot o' steamin' to do 'fore we strike Virgin Bay. And remember, now, us two, Fletch and me, are jest elbow-crookers you knowed when you were in Californy before.

II

IN THE brassy glare the receding hull of the *Star of the West* became a grotesque parody of a ship, with exaggerated paddle-boxes and crooked stacks, and the cane huts of Greytown and the frame buildings of Punta Arenas seemed to float detached from their foundations; the jungle walls of the lagoon were a green blur. Aboard the river-steamers men sat or lay upon the decks, panting in the terrible heat; the few women among the passengers had retired to the staterooms provided for them. The ocean liner, so lately crowded with life, rode now deserted, her tired crew taking what rest they could in the interval before the returning sternwheelers, a few days hence, should fetch down-river the eastward-bound swarm of Californians and the stack of bullion-boxes which would stimulate anew the national frenzy for what frowsy old Daniel Drew called "speckilation."

So thought Ormerod as he sat with his back propped against the *Wheeler's* strong-room, peering through the shimmering haze as the sternwheelers threshed into the estuary of the San Juan, a broad, placid reach between low banks dense with *gamalote* grass, its coarse stems stiffly erect in the motionless air. Wild fowl whirred upward, startled by the puffing of the engines and the *slap-slap* of the paddles; dingy, barnacled alligators plunged from the banks, and once, where the river narrowed in the embrace of flat islets, a manatee, or sea-cow, which had been feeding on the grass, lifted its ridiculous snout, snorted indignantly and flopped out of sight. Of man's occupation there was not a trace.

"Ain't much to see," drawled Jenkins, lying beside Ormerod. "Reckon I'll ketch me a wink o' sleep."

Ormerod nodded assent. Cabot was aft, gossiping with a group of New Englanders, and he was not sorry to be left alone to

watch the panorama of tropical nature in its most luxuriant mood. On his previous trip in the Spring he had been more concerned with the mechanics of the Transit, the operation of the ships and their crews, the care of passengers, the handling of freight. He welcomed his opportunity to banish serious considerations and enjoy the experience for which it was worth. It chimed in with his mood, promised to divert his mind from pondering the insoluble.

Five miles upstream the banks began to heighten, marshy soil gave way to firm ground and feathery palms in rank profusion supplanted the undergrowth of cane and *gamalote*. Almost imperceptibly the jungle fastened its grip upon the river. Other trees became mingled with the palms, and a wild riot of vines and climbing plants, the *cpoiù*, the convolulus, the *caracol*, the passion flower, the sensitive plant, the sarsaparilla, orchids of a score of varieties and lianas of infinite length, twined the trunks in an impenetrable web of vegetation, glowing with color. Monkeys, big and little, tailed and tailless, jabbered and danced overhead. Birds as vivid as a bar of music streaked through the foliage—parrots, green, yellow and crimson; green macaws in couples, screeching discordantly; parakeets, tall cranes and snowy aigrets. Iguanas, from six inches to five feet in length, hissed from the limbs of trees, the larger ones more hideous than the pop-eyed alligators that lurched under water as the steamboats approached.

As the afternoon waned the power of the sun decreased; a sudden shower of rain spattered the decks, and was followed by a languorous breeze. The banks became higher and higher, hills showed occasionally over the tree-tops, and behind the hills the blue loom of mountains, where the spine of the Cordillera traversed the dwindling bulk of the isthmus. Fourteen miles above the port they entered the main stream above the juncture with the Colorado, and the channel broadened and deepened continually until they had passed the mouth of the Serapiqui, a mysterious tributary, which, a pocket-map informed Ormerod, took its rise at the base of the great volcano of Cartago in Costa Rica.

Ormerod regarded the silvery vista with an interest prompted by the map's laconic inscription "unexplored" across the face of the country between the San Juan and Cartago's broad base. Certainly, since the time of the Conquistadores no white man had passed that way; it was as sacred to the savage aborigines as the jungly lowlands of the Mosquito Shore. Perhaps that explained

the chill which assailed him as the *Wheeler* puffed by the unused water highway, so beautiful in its solitary majesty, yet dank with a sinister hint of unknown perils. For by no possible conjunction of human talents and instincts could he have previsaged the use to which the Serapiqui was to be put some fifteen months later nor the part it was to play in making history.

Another three hours' steaming brought them to the mouth of the San Carlos, a second major tributary from the south, and like the Serapiqui, born in the foothills under Cartago. Beyond this point the San Juan was compressed between banks so lofty as to remind Ormerod of the Highlands of the Hudson. On the left hand the mountains towering over them were wreathed in clouds, and in the deep gorge of the river the twilight shut down with the unexpectedness of a lamp blown out in a draught. The steamer's engines coughed more slowly, and she headed into the shore of a wooded island, her consort not far astern. Jenkins roused himself with a yawn.

"Got to wait for moonlight," he observed.

"We go on, then?" asked Ormerod.

"Yes, luckily. If 'twasn't for the moon we'd have to lie up till sunrise. The Mississippi is an open channel compared to this yere river. But thar's an early moon, and enough water to see us over the Machuca Rapids, so we oughter make Castillo Viejo round midnight."

III

ONE moment a myriad fireflies sparked like twirling flower-petals against the velvet curtain of the night; the next the yellow moon-glare had blotted them out. The river trembled away into the forest depths as plain to the eye as in the sunlight of afternoon, a thread of liquid silver running in a mold of whispering purple shadows; high overhead the sheer peaks of fairy mountains, each leafy ridge etched clean upon the turquoise splendor of the sky. Ormerod caught his breath at the beauty of it, too exquisite to last. And in another moment the spell was broken. A bell tinkled in the *Wheeler's* engine-room; the hoarse command of the captain sent a brace of deck-hands to cast loose the mooring, and the panting of the engine mingled again with the *slap-slap* of the paddles.

"Kinder pretty," said Jenkins. "Makes you choke up—like Shasta, with the moon on it."

"What a lot you must have seen, Tom," exclaimed Ormerod.

"A leetle, here and there," the scout admitted. "But you been to Europe, which the ways folks talk must be a right-smart heftier place than any this side o' the world."

"Don't you believe it," returned Ormerod energetically. "Where would you see a scene like this in Europe? Europe! It's a joke compared to America. Why, the Alps are nothing beside the Rockies!"

"And the Rockies ain't much more'n foothills for the High Sierras," ruminated Jenkins. "Humph! I allus did wonder why so many folks come over from Europe. It seemed like they was astray if they wasn't headed for better trappin'."

The two lapsed into silence, lending their senses to full enjoyment of the spectacle. Except for the puffing of the engines and the mumble of the few passengers who were awake, the steamers were noiseless, and the only sounds from the surrounding forests were the occasional screech of a puma, the scutter of little hoofs behind the matted undergrowth and the howling of monkeys disturbed in their sleep by the passing vessels. Once the gleam of a fire showed through the trees, and Ormerod had an indistinct glimpse of naked figures darting from cover to cover.

"Melchoras," said Jenkins. "Injuns."

"Wild?" queried Ormerod, feeling for his pistol.

"Wild enough, but no more hurt in 'em than in them deer we heerd round that last bend."

Again, the *Wheeler* waddled out of an archipelago of miniature islands, and in a cove of the right bank surprized a sounder of peccaries, which flashed their tusks angrily, squealed and fled.

Then, for a time, the river became peaceful. An hour went by, and Ormerod pricked up his ears at a strange, subdued murmur that funneled between the banks.

"The Machuca Rapids," said Jenkins. "Remember?"

"Of course! You said there was sufficient water to climb them. We ought to be swinging over to the right bank— Ah, I see we are steering into the channel."

The surface of the river had commenced to whiten; rocks thrust themselves above the surface, and the current swirled and twisted ominously. The pilots headed to starboard, as Ormerod had remarked, following the one practicable course in an inferno of reefs and boulders. Elsewhere any passage was impossible. Here, beneath the right bank, by skilful handling the flat-bottomed sternwheeler was pushed along against the current, the engine driving with every ounce of steam-pressure available, the paddle-wheel churning and threshing, the iron hull bumping and clanging whenever it skated a submerged rock or caromed off the side of a reef.

The sleeping passengers roused in alarm, but were reassured by the crew and those who had made the Transit before.

"There's only a mile of these rapids," Ormerod consoled a group that clustered about him and Jenkins. "The boats climb them regularly, unless the water is unusually low."

"If 'twas, you all 'ud have to git out and walk," added the scout.

The current continued strong above the Machuca, and there were two more moderate rapids, the Mico and the Valos, to

pass; but the sternwheelers waddled steadily along, spattering the water with their blunt bows and flailing paddles. And after several leagues of easy travel they steamed around the head of a wooded island, and for the second time in his life Ormerod stared up at the frowning pile of Castillo Viejo, the Castle of San Juan of the Spaniards, perched on its scarped hill-pyramid, its shattered battlements repaired by moon-magic so that it looked to possess all the sturdy strength which had enabled it to repel no less an enemy than Nelson. The roar of the Castillo Rapids boomed out like the ghostly echoes of its vanished ordnance.

Cabot, and many another passenger awakened without urging when the voice of the angry waters assailed his ears. He sat up on the deck, digging his fingers into his eyes.

"Saved you the trouble," he yawned. "Or, rather, the rapids did. No climbing them, I can tell you."

Indeed, at that instant several of the Transit employees passed aft along the decks, shouting:

"All out here! Change at the Old Castle for the upper river boats. Have your baggage ready."

"We'll have time for a bite," said Cabot. "What do you say to going up to the Crescent Hotel, Ormerod? You can get honest ham-and-eggs and coffee there—at San Francisco prices, to be sure."

"I'm agreeable, if Tom is," answered Ormerod.

"I never do seem to git my bellyful," replied the scout.

"But don't you two have to do any work as Transit employees?" queried Ormerod, half-jocularly.

Jenkins winked slowly, and Cabot explained:

"Our working is what you might call an intermittent disease; sometimes we have it, and then again we're cured. It all depends upon whether anybody is watching who might want to seem nosey. Now, at Castillo Viejo, after midnight, with seven hundred argonauts out for deviltry and *aguardiente* until they can be transferred to the upper-river boats—which won't be before morning—why, I think we can safely risk seeming to be Californians instead of Transit boatmen, eh, Tom?"

"Ain't nobody goin' to ask us why we eat, so long as we pay," returned the frontiersman.

IV

THE Crescent Hotel was a palatial shack, unsheathed plank walls, tamped earthen floor and trestleboard tables. Down one side of the big room which served as restaurant ran a bar of unfinished lightwood, and Ormerod could not help perceiving that Jenkins cast a longing eye at the gathering array of emigrants who clamored for attention from the hairy guardians of bottle and keg. In fact, after the three friends had taken seats at a table near one of the doors, he started to rise, muttering something inaudible to Ormerod; but Cabot caught him by the coat-sleeve.

"We're on duty, Tom," cautioned the Bostonian.

Jenkins sank back on the bench with a curse.

"I'm one o' them fellers that hanker for licker every so often," he confessed bitterly to Ormerod. "I kin go without it for long spells, and then the cravin' hits me. But Fletch is right. And the colonel 'ud have me shot if I busted loose here."

"Shot!" exclaimed Ormerod. "Oh, come, now! You're right not to drink, Tom, and I suppose a soldier ought to be punished for drunkenness, but—"

"You know the colonel," said the frontiersman grimly. "He shore is —— on discipline."

"He has to be," spoke up Cabot. "We're no herd of little lambs."

The three fell silent, watching the noisy demonstration of the argonauts, most of whom devoted their immediate efforts to the draining of hookers of rum and whiskey. A frowsy waiter came, received the order from Cabot and presently returned with a platter, smoking hot.

"We're lucky," said Cabot. "When those idiots all desire to eat there'll be a long wait. Hullo!"

A man in the broadcloth of a merchant stepped out of the shadows by the door into a blob of light that hung pendulous below a whale-oil ship's lantern, and scowled triumphantly at Jenkins, across the table from him.

"Don't move," ordered the newcomer. "I've got you covered, Jenkins—gun in my pocket."

Ormerod looked up, considerably startled. The speaker was Spencer, whom last he

had seen descending the stairs from Commodore Vanderbilt's office; but the spy paid no attention to the New Yorker, who sat at the end of the table, with his back against the wall, his face outside the circle of lantern-light.

The bushy whiskers seemed to bristle aggressively; the red bottle-nose shone with exultation.

"This is different from 'Frisco, ain't it?" he asked. "No, hold still, you, Cabot. I can turn my gun on you, if I need to."

His scowl became a grin of derision.

"I thought I recognized you, so I sent for a file of the guard. Say, the *commandante* will be tickled to have a chance to stand two of Walker's men in front of a firing-squad."

"You talk like we was thar already," drawled Jenkins. "What do you think these other *Americanos* are agoin' to say?"

"They'll say nothing," Spencer retorted fiercely. "If they try to interfere, I'll shoot you where you sit."

"They'd tear you in pieces before the Nicaraguans could get in," jeered Cabot.

"Don't be too brash, Spencer," warned Jenkins. "We got Derringers. If you git one o' us, t'other's liable to—"

The spy's ruddled cheeks paled.

"That'll do! I'm not running a bluff. Hear that!"

The soft *shuffle-shuffle-slap* of bare feet in cadence whispered through the din from the bar.

"All I got to do is whistle," he announced. "They'll come a-runnin'."

He gestured toward Ormerod with his left hand.

"Lean over the table, stranger. Let's have a look at you. You're in bad company."

Ormerod bent over until the lantern-light revealed his whole face and torso.

"I fancy you know me," he said coldly. "I saw you some weeks ago in New York—and before that in San Francisco."

Spencer's flabby lips parted in astonishment.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Ormerod?" he stammered.

"What do you suppose?" replied Ormerod.

"I—I— Did the Commodore—"

"I have nothing to say to you," answered Ormerod, "except that you are very officious, and an officious agent is not likely to be regarded with favor."

"I—say, Mr. Ormerod—are these—"

"Why did you run from me the morning I passed you on the stairs of Mr. Vanderbilt's office?" pressed Ormerod sarcastically. "Were you afraid I might finish up the job I started in Montgomery Street?"

Spencer's face flushed to the hue of stale wine-lees under this badgering.

"No," he snarled. "I'm not afraid of you. You think you're a —— of a lot because you work for the Commodore—"

"That will do," Ormerod interrupted sharply. "If you want to get into trouble, use that name publicly. Hear me?"

The question snapped like a whip-lash. Spencer cowered almost abjectly.

"All right, all right," he whined. "How was I to know—"

"Take your hand out of that pocket!"

The spy's right hand jerked down to his side.

"Have you ordered that detail outside to seize my *friends?*"

Ormerod emphasized the word, so that Spencer winced.

"Only—only—they're to come in when I call."

Ormerod turned to Jenkins.

"Do you understand Spanish, Tom?"

The scout nodded.

"Very well. Spencer, tell the officer in command of the detail that you are mistaken, you will not require their services."

Spencer opened his mouth to speak, then shut it again, flabbily stubborn.

"Look here," he protested. "These—these are two of Walker's men. That fellow—" he pointed at Jenkins—"is his Man Friday. They're a good haul. And they must be up to something down here on the Transit."

"Do you know who I am?" rasped Ormerod.

"Yes," Spencer admitted sullenly.

"Then be kind enough to believe that you do not know everything that is going on. Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Cabot are not to be interfered with."

"Are you making yourself responsible for them?" asked Spencer, still sullen.

"I am. But that is none of your business."

"Well, I'm paid to keep track of what goes on, just as much as you are," blustered the spy.

"It is not a question of pay, but of intelligence," rejoiced Ormerod. "Get out of here, and let us eat in peace."

Spencer teetered uncertainly on the ball of his foot, staring from one to the other of the three at the table. Ormerod frowned at him so savagely that he avoided the New Yorker's glance, and presently turned away.

"Oh, all right," he grumbled. "But I'm not responsible. And it ain't fair to put two men on the same job, without tellin'—"

"We are not on the same job, Spencer," said Ormerod, icily. "I am waiting to hear you tell that officer outside to dismiss his men."

Spencer growled a sentence in Spanish out of the doorway, and Ormerod looked questioningly at Jenkins. The frontiersman nodded reassuringly, as a sibilant: "*Sí, Señor* Spencer," was followed by the rattle of shifted muskets, and the slurring *shuffle-shuffle-slap* of bare feet, dwindling up the hillside toward the Castle.

"Satisfied?" snarled the spy.

"Yes," assented Ormerod. "Oh, one thing more. If I were you, I should remember that you are supposed not to take sides any more. It might have embarrassing consequences."

Spencer glowered at him.

"Say, am I supposed to take orders from you?"

"Suit yourself," said Ormerod indifferently.

"I will," fumed Spencer. "And I'll —— well know where you stand before I get through."

He flung himself out the door, and Ormerod resumed his interrupted meal, aware that both his companions were eying him somewhat askance. Jenkins spoke first.

"Waal, Pete, I reckon we all owe you our necks."

"Nonsense," returned Ormerod shortly. "There are seven hundred Americans here."

"They mebbe would have fussed a leetle, but 'twouldn't have done us no good," Jenkins answered placidly. "The Legitimists ain't got no use a-tall for the colonel's men."

"They burned our wounded at Rivas," added Cabot. "Chained 'em on a woodpile in the Plaza after we'd retreated. That's the kind of treatment we have to expect if we're taken. Consequently, Rule One of the *Falange Americana*, as they call us, is: No surrender."

"I reckon weall 'ud have taken Spencer with us," reflected Jenkins; "but that wouldn't have kept us alive, eh?"

Ormerod muttered assent, ill at ease, debating whether or not he had been justified in taking advantage of his connection with the Commodore. A question from Cabot helped to clear up his doubts.

"I'm going to be frank, Ormerod," said the ex-cabby. "I know you won't mind. And what I want to ask you is: Just what did you mean in talking with Spencer?"

"What did I mean?"

"Yes. What did you have up your sleeve that bluffed him? What was all that talk about Vanderbilt? Is Spencer down here for the Commodore?"

Ormerod considered this.

"I can't answer you," he replied at length. "What I know I know by accident, and because—because—well, because of—ah—personal relations—in a certain quarter."

"Because you happen to be Vanderbilt's lawyer," Cabot put in cheerfully. "Sure! We know that, too."

"And so does Spencer," Ormerod reminded him. "He comes from New York. I saw him there a few weeks ago."

"And you evidently learned he was selling out to your boss," suggested Cabot. "What's the use of being so mysterious? Tom and I can put one and one together and get pretty close to two for answer, if you won't tell us. It's just that—"

"Put yourself in my place," interposed Ormerod. "I took advantage of my knowledge of a client's business affairs to help you two. It was the sort of thing that would have been dishonorable if it had been prompted by a desire to help myself. I'm not sure but what it was dishonorable, anyway; but I'm not sorry I did it. I'd do it again. Only I can't tell you what I know."

"Reckon Pete has the right of it, Fletch," said Jenkins. "We all cain't blame him for standin' by a friend. That's what he done for us, feller."

"True enough," agreed the ex-cabby; "but I'm thinking of the expedition. If Vanderbilt is working in with the Legitimists' spies, we want to know it."

"You won't know from me," returned Ormerod.

Cabot bent his head in thought, regardless of the scout's tall figure erect at his elbow.

"You're right," he answered presently, and rose. "I guess we can make the colonel see it, too. But you don't know him as

well as I do. He's one of the kind that insist you must be all for 'em or all against 'em. He may— But we can cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Shore we can," affirmed Jenkins. "The colonel's sot in his ways, but he's plumb reasonable. What say we all stroll up the bank, and git ourselves beddin' room on the upper-river boat? These yere pilgrims—" he jerked a thumb at the emigrants beginning to desert the bar for the tables— "will wait till the whistles blow."

Ormerod assented, and the three paid their reckoning—two dollars and a half apiece for a plate of ham-and-eggs, dry bread and coffee—and walked out into the moonlight, passing by a path over the terrace of the *platforma*, or water-battery, and so into a roadway bordered by a wooden railroad along the bank. The heavy baggage from the two sternwheelers was being transported in handcars over this railroad to a second wharf above the rapids, where two similar boats waited to carry the passengers the remaining distance of some thirty miles up-river to Fort San Carlos at the point where the San Juan flowed out of Lake Nicaragua.

Under the expert guidance of his friends, he selected a sheltered spot on the lower deck—for the night had become cool, even verging on chilly, and a freshening breeze was blowing—crawled under the blankets they freely shared with him, and went to sleep as easily as if he lay in his own bedroom in Pearl Street.

V

ORMEROD awoke twice, once during the hustle of passengers to get aboard before the boat started and again when the bumping and laboring of the hull and the babble of excited conversation around him bespoke the passage of another rapid. He sat up, and in doing so roused Cabot, who grunted:

"El Toro. Nothing to lose sleep for."

The New Yorker had an impression of lower banks and a broader stream, with the same jungle walls rising straight from the water's edge, and the round yellow moon low in the western sky. It was astonishingly cold, very different from the humid heat of Greytown, and he understood why Jenkins had pitched their beds close by the engine-room door. Forward, in the lee of the women's cabin, a party of young Georgians sat huddled in overcoats and blankets, singing "Listen to the Mocking Bird," and the ringing voices, pitched low, lulled him back to sleep.

"I'm dre-e-aming of Hallie,
She's lying in the-e-e valley,
And the mocking bird is singing where she lies."

When he woke again the sun was up behind them, the air was warm and pleasantly exhilarating and a mile or two ahead the blue-and-white flag of Nicaragua, with its lozenge of three volcanos, fluttered from a staff atop of a forested hill, which he knew was a mammoth fortification, half-conquered by the jungle.

Jenkins tossed aside the blankets, and walked with him to the rail.

"San Carlos," said the scout. "Here's whar we git the fust sight o' the lake."

Suddenly, the vista of the river seemed to open out, immeasurably vast; white caps appeared in the distance and the sunshine glinted on the soaring peaks of volcanic cones, so regular in outline that Ormerod asked himself, as he had the first time he had seen them, if they were real. They might have been drawn by the hand of some giant artist in misty blue against the lighter azure of the sky. There was Orosi on the farther shore of the lake, southwest toward the Pacific. South of Orosi loomed the Peaks of Merivalles, and behind them marched the hazy barrier of the Cordillera of Costa Rica. Northwest, Omotepec and Madeira towered majestically from the waters of the lake, their summits wreathed in clouds that rippled and tore in the breezes of the upper air. On either hand low forested shores stretched away as far as the eye could see, northward, as Ormerod knew, to the limitless grazing lands of Chontales, a natural cattle country; southward, to the unexplored wilderness of the Costa Rican frontier. Except for the mountain peaks, the opposite shore was invisible, a good forty miles across substantial blue rollers, dotted with islands, large and small.

"Purty," said Jenkins. "I never seed a country fitter for prosperity. All a man has to do to eat is to scratch a hole in the ground and drop a seed. But these yere natives is never more'n one jump ahead o' starvation, and 'stead o' gittin' rich they're gittin' porer all the time fightin' each other."

"The Spaniards called it Mahomet's Paradise," said Cabot, joining them.

"Wa'al, I'd shore call it —— today," commented the scout. "Thar's the lake steamers awaitin' for us under the fort. I'll be glad to git aboard 'em. We cain't make San Juan del Sur too soon for me, boys, not after that ruckus with Spencer last night."

"Where's his partner, Webster?" inquired Ormerod.

"In Granada, last we heerd," answered Jenkins.

"Our Democratic friends have spies there," added Cabot. "They told us the Honorable Billy was thick with all the Legitimist politicians, swelling around as an English secret agent. We wondered what had become of Spencer. He must have sneaked north in disguise."

Ormerod was not disposed to continue this conversation, and the three stood without speaking until the sternwheelers had made fast to the wharf projecting from the shore below the fort. The lake steamers, which were larger paddle-wheel vessels such as plied the inland waterways of the United States, were moored across the wharf. They had roomier and more comfortable accommodations, and their galleys exuded odors that inspired every passenger with a desire to hurry the transfer. So in a remarkably short space of time the baggage was safely stowed, passengers were eating in relays as fast as they could be served, and the steamers had cast off and headed out into the lake.

As the sun rose the heat increased, but the northeast trade-winds tempered it, and the most callous and materially-minded of the emigrants thrilled to the unceasing loveliness of the scene; the cloud-piercing peaks of the volcanos, the brilliant verdure of the shore line, the continual islets that gemmed the blue waters, the many-colored sails of the *bongos*, the darting canoes inshore, the naked brown people who waved to them as they passed occasional clearings or fishermen's settlements. The air, despite the heat, was like wine. It was difficult for Ormerod to remember that the country was prostrate under the heel of war, no man's life or property safe beyond the bounds of the Transit concessions.

The cone of Ometepec rose higher and higher over the starboard bow, with Madeira standing like a faithful wife beside it, as they steamed on. The *Virgen* and the *San Carlos* left Sapote Island to port, and rounded the northwest end of the long island of Solentenami, then headed on under the lee of the still greater land-mass of Ometepec, with its two enormous mountains, seeming to start almost perpendicularly out of the lake, although the nearer the steamers drew to the island the more apparent its area became, a proper foundation for such cloud-draped peaks. Northwest of Ometepec, now, the voyagers had their first view of Momobacho, standing sentinel over Granada and the whole northern end of the lake. And in early afternoon they opened the shallow indentation of Virgin Bay, an unsheltered roadstead where the steamers must tie up to a rickety wharf, in order to ride the freshening groundswell stirred by the mighty breath of the trades.

The street of the little settlement was clogged with the white-and-blue coaches of the Transit Company, in which the final stage of the journey was to be made to San Juan del Sur, the port of the company's Pacific steamers. And besides the coaches, twenty-five in number, there was a long caravan of trucks for the carriage of the heavy baggage, as well as a considerable herd of riding-horses for the benefit of those travelers who scorned a vehicle and were willing to pay extra for the chance to show off in the saddle.

It was an old story to Ormerod, of course, and he gave the Transit's train hardly a glance, his attention concentrated on the little detachment of lancers, seventeen strong, who cantered up to the wharf as soon as they recognized Jenkins' lean figure. To tell the truth, many of the emigrants found more to interest them in this picturesque troop than in the more conventional machine of travel. Wiry men of middle-size, brown and copper-colored, mounted on compact, muscular horses, the lancers rode like centaurs, handling their awkward weapons as if the ten-foot staves were merely a prolongation of one arm. Their officer, who was a horse's length in advance, was a very fat old man, quite evidently all Indian, with close-cropped, bristling, gray hair and fierce, up-curled gray mustache. Like his troopers, he had his lance upstanding on his stirrup and looped to his right shoulder, a ponderous dragoon saber belted to his left side, a tremendous pair of horse-pistols in leather holsters attached to his

saddle, and a guitar strapped to his back.

"*Hola, Dón* Tomas!" he cried. And more in fervid Spanish, nodding his head savagely at Ormerod.

The lancers reined in beside the three Americans, their horses' hoofs digging deep in the soft sand, while Jenkins drawled an answer. Instantly, the old Indian was all smiles. He bent from his saddle, and offered Ormerod a grimy hand.

" 'Ow the —— you aire, Señor Don Pedro?" he said. "I mak' myself much joy for you—ees good for Nicaragua and La Democracia. You shall be my frien'—*sí, sí, mi corazon!* You shall be frien' to me, to ol' Valle, *Coronel* of Lancers, who ees call' Chelon by those who lofe heem."

Ormerod smiled up at the lined, honest face, the face of any soldier of any land, simple, straightforward, direct.

"It is an honor to be your friend, Chelon," he answered.

"We are bot' 'onair'," exclaimed Valle. "You shall ride wiz me, Don Pedro, and I weell sing to you. *Sí, sí,* I weell sing you of 'ow I fight and 'ow my enemies fee-air me."

He twisted his mustache.

"All rrrrun from Chelon," he announced. "Day by day, Don Tomas, Don Fletchairrrr I ride from San Juan to zee lak'. Day by day I shake my lance at Rivas. I sen' worrrd to Guardiola, to Corral, to Xatruche. I say, 'Come out, *picaros!* Come out, an' fight wiz Chelon!' But zhey hide behin' ze barricad'. 'No, no,' zhey say, 'we don' lik' Chelon' lance. 'Ees no good!' "

He stared proudly about him, enjoying childishly the amazed audience of emigrants that had begun to cluster around the group; but this very circumstance impelled Jenkins to break up the conversation.

"That's good talk, Chelon," said the scout. "But you know, the colonel is waiting for us. Plenty of time to gab on the road. What say?"

The lancer shrugged.

"Always Cheelon ees rrready, Don Tomas."

"Shore you are! Never knowed you not to be," conceded Jenkins, grinning. "For a fight or a drunk or a serenade. Always ready."

Chelon beamed.

"*Sí, sí,*" he boasted. "Chelon ees always rrready for zee fon or zee sprrree."

"Waal, now you got to be ready to ride. Boys—" to Ormerod and Cabot—"come on over to the stable-boss with me, and we'll rent us Transit nags. Then we'll pull out ahead o' the train."

They rode back along the street to where Valle and his lancers awaited them in the midst of a circle of curious Americans, who were investigating the scanty attractions of Virgin Bay during their enforced wait while the baggage was fetched ashore and loaded on the trucks.

Ormerod was pleased as a small boy to hear, as he and his friends took their places in the little column under the red pennons, a murmur from the crowd of respectful argonauts:

"Sure! Walker's men."

He comprehended as never before in that moment the spell which lies in military endeavor, the binding power, the blinding pride, of adhesion to one leader, of membership in one organization.

Clinkety-clink went the bridles. *Rattle-bang* echoed the lance-butts in the stirrup-cups. And the hoofs beat a muffled, tattoo in the dust of the metaled road. Valle began to sing in a husky tenor, a song of impassioned avowal and bitter denunciation. Ormerod bent his head to Jenkins' ear, questioning the theme admiringly.

"Wa'al," drawled the scout, "as near's I kin make out, it's all about how a flea loved a cockroach, and what a —— of a time the pair o' 'em had."

VI

"*QUIEN VIVE?*"

The nasal challenge greeted the lancers as they trotted out of the forest into an open space abutting on a bridge which carried the Transit Road over a small river. On the farther side a stubby sentinel stood boldly, his musket at the charge.

"*La Democracia,*" roared Valle, and the sentinel came smartly to the present.

Ormerod was impressed by the man's alert discipline, and even more, as the troop filed past the rigid bronze figure in its dirty-white uniform, by his self-reliant bearing. This *Indio* was a freeman, who was soldier by choice.

A hundred yards in rear of the sentinel a picket of native infantry stood to their arms as Valle trotted by with a hearty: "*Como estan, mis negritos?*" The delighted grins on the brown and copper faces told Ormerod more than words of the hold

the fat old lancer had on his own people's affection.

For another mile the troop traversed the forest, then they emerged upon a slight eminence, and the ramshackle village of San Juan del Sur was unfolded beneath them, like all the communities along the Transit, as Ormerod thought, in its resemblance rather to a California mining camp than to the massively built native towns, with their Moresque architecture and low, whitewashed adobe buildings. Numerous "hotels," bars, restaurants, gambling houses and stores lining the one principal street were rickety structures of green lumber, with signboards that might have been taken from any American village: "The Commercial House," "Casey's," "The Square Game," "Hobby's Restowront."

The harbor looked crowded with a brig and a couple of schooners at anchor inshore, and beyond them a big sidewheeler, vomiting smoke from her stacks.

"The California steamer is in," commented Cabot.

"Shore hope she fotched down some more *filibusteros*," drawled Jenkins.

On the edge of the town they encountered an outpost of Americans, commanded by no less a person than the German, von Ritterstein, whom Ormerod had met at Duval's in San Francisco. The former cavalry officer's saturnine features lighted as Cabot directed his attention to the New Yorker, and he sheathed the sword he had drawn to return Valle's pompous salute.

"Goodt," he rumbled, shaking Ormerod's hand. "You are der first recroot from der East, Mr. Omerrrod. But today we haf much luck from der West, too. Thirrty-fife men der *Cortes* brings us frrom 'Frisco, undt Charley Gilman in commandt of dem."

"That's plumb in the buff'ler's hump," exclaimed Jenkins.

"Thirty-five men," cried Cabot. "Why, that means we've got an army."

The German wagged his head seriously.

"One hundert undt ten men, by my count."

"*And* Charley Gilman," amended Jenkins.

Cabot turned to Ormerod.

"You don't know Gilman. He was with the Chief in Sonora—lost his leg there. He's been all this time getting over it."

Valle thumped his chest.

"By zee Blessed Benito, do you forrrrrget Chelon? An' wiz Chelon rrride zee mos' brrrrav' lances of Nicaragua, an' he 'ave also zee infantrrree who 'ave no fearrr."

Cabot grinned openly at this boast, but Jenkins replied soberly:

"Shore, Chelon, we all 'ud be lost without yore push o' —— raisers. But with all this yere good news the colonel will be wantin' to hear from us, so I reckon we'd oughter mozey on, *muy pronto*."

"*Bueno*," assented the lancer, his vanity satisfied.

They said good-by to von Ritterstein, and at the next corner the lancers branched off to their quarters behind a feed store, Valle insisting, much to Ormerod's dismay, upon embracing him with protestations of devotion and comradeship in the field.

"We are *soldados*, *mi alma*," he declared. "You're a beeg man. I am a beeg man. Togezzer we fight zee 'ole worrrl.' Tcht! I say it, I, Chelon! I 'ave a love for you. You mus' be lancer, an' rride wiz me—over zee barrricad' into Rivas—into Masaya—into Managua—into Granada! You weell be famous man, like me. *Sí*, *sí*, I weell mak' songs about you. An' so I keess you on zee chik—so—an' so!"

Ormerod was so shamefaced under this compulsory osculation, which had taken him by surprize, that Cabot laughed openly as soon as the old Indian's back was turned; but Jenkins only grinned.

"Sho', Pete, don't take it to heart," he advised. "You act like his whiskers hurt you. He means well, and you ain't none the wuss 'cause Chelon is yore friend. He's a good *hombre*, one o' the best. Wish to God we had a couple o' thousand more like him."

"He's too —— affectionate," growled Ormerod. "The old flea-basket! Well, I'll be on my guard with him, after this."

The main street of San Juan was thronged with Eastbound passengers from California, and mingled with them were scores of men from whom Ormerod identified as filibusters by their gaunt, sun-tanned faces, and inpromptu uniforms and equipment—wool or felt hats, wide-brimmed; corduroy or jean trousers; blue flannel shirts, half-boots, more or less worn and patched; rifle, bowie-knife and one or two revolvers. They had the hardbitten, confident look

of men who have proved themselves in the face of adversity. The returning Californians, who had sampled the ordinary hardships of the frontier, appeared tame and civilized by contrast with them.

In front of the Commercial House the swirl was thickest, which Cabot explained by the interjection:

"Headquarters. Shall we dismount, Tom?"

The scout nodded, without speaking, and they tossed their bridles to a half-naked *mestizo* boy, who shambled out from under the heels of the milling Americans, all, apparently, either fighting a passage in or out of the bar or intent upon staring at whoever showed himself in the main entrance of the hotel, where two riflemen mounted guard. These latter recognized Ormerod's companions at once.

"Howdy, Up," they greeted Jenkins. "How's that air Pickmeup book holdin' out, Fletch?"

"We got a report for the colonel," drawled Jenkins. "All right to go up?"

"Who's yore friend?" queried one of the riflemen, jerking his head in Ormerod's direction.

"Friend o' the colonel—from New York."

"Wa'al, I reckon youall kin go in. Tell de Morebecque. He's in the hall."

Several men in the same rough uniform as the guards were standing inside the entrance. All wore swords, and one, who was doing most of the talking, had a wooden leg. He was a big, open-faced fellow. But no larger than his companions, for that matter. Indeed, Ormerod soon discovered that very few of the filibusters were small men.

"Howdy, Gilman," said Jenkins. "Howdy, Hornsby. Say, Louis—" this to a third man Ormerod perceived to be the Frenchman, de Morbecque, who had been a member of Walker's party that night at Duval's— "Fletch and I got a report for the Colonel—and Ormerod, here, is jest in from New York. Reckon the colonel 'ud want to see him, too."

De Morbecque came forward briskly to meet them.

"But, yes, Tom," he answered. "The colonel asked for you but thees morning. 'Ow are you, Fletchair? Meestaire Orrmerod, I am ver' honored to meet you again. The colonel has spoke of you, eh, boys?"

"He'll be glad to see Ormerod," said Cabot. "As Carl von Ritterstein said, Ormerod is about our first recruit from the East. And I think he has news the colonel will be anxious to hear."

"I go up now," replied de Morbecque. "While you wait, 'ere is Charley Gilman, who has brought thirty-five men from 'Frisco—and tells there are shiploads to follow."

"For a fact?" exclaimed Jenkins.

The one-legged man nodded.

"They heard of Virgin Bay a week before we sailed. The town was crazy over it. You might have thought Fremont was elected."

The other officer, a craggy-jawed, long-legged man, with a Quixotic cast of countenance, interrupted.

"What do they think of Colonel Walker in New York? My name is Hornsby, Mr. Ormerod."

"I should say you could get more men in the East than in the West—if you score a decisive success," answered Ormerod.

De Morbecque reappeared on the stairs.

"Weell you be so kin' as to wait a few minute', Meestaire Ormerod," he called. "The colonel 'ave ask' Tom and Fletchair to come up firs'."

"Make yourself comfortable," Cabot advised the New Yorker. "We may be quite a while."

"Shore," assented Jenkins. "Thar's a bar right next door. You kin git yoreself a snort sent over, if you like."

"I'll be all right," returned Ormerod. "A chair will feel good after the saddle."

Hornsby blinked owlishly at Gilman as the pair of emissaries tramped upstairs.

"Did you hear what Mr. Ormerod said?" he asked. "For myself, I should be inclined to doubt the quality of Eastern recruits. We'd scarcely get trained riflemen."

"Probably not," agreed the one-legged man. "But any recruits can be trained. The main thing is to get them."

He settled his sword-belt.

"Which reminds me that I must be off about my duties. My company has been detailed to escort the Eastbound treasure to Virgin Bay."

"And I'm officer of the day, and must see that two shiploads of passengers don't tear the town apart," said Hornsby. "You said you were joining us, Mr. Ormerod? That's fine! We'll see you later."

Ormerod thanked him, and settled down to wait in the dark hallway. Twilight was at hand, and through chinks in the wall beams of light sifted from the noisy uproar of the bar. De Morbecque had followed Jenkins and Cabot upstairs, and it was inevitable that Ormerod should seize the opportunity to balance the ledger of his experiences. Gone was the boyish exultation that had visited him when he rode from Virgin Bay with the lancers. There was nothing gay and picturesque about the Americans in San Juan. They lacked entirely the raffish charm of Valle. And the quiet, thoughtful conduct of Hornsby and Gilman had impressed him—impressed him exactly as had the well-oiled rifles and the double portion of revolvers the belts of most of the *Falanginos* displayed. Here was no prickling of lance-points in the sunlight, no fluttering of crimson pennons, no mingling of war and music. No, no! Here was a serious business, an enterprise of men who coolly gambled with lives for a rich stake of wealth and honor.

A light flickered at the head of the stairs, and Walker's calm, passionless voice cut into Ormerod's meditations like a surgeon's knife.

"That is very well, Tom. As for what Cabot says, I shall, of course, weigh it carefully in light of what Mr. Ormerod cares to tell me; but I do not think we need be concerned about the matter. You might send Mr. Ormerod upstairs, de Morbecque."

"But, yes, Colonel," answered the Frenchman.

Feet sounded on the stair.

"What? No light below?" exclaimed Walker. "Perhaps he has gone."

Ormerod stirred.

"I am here, Colonel," he called up.

Walker leaned over the unpainted balustrade, holding a lamp in one hand.

"I am glad to see you again, sir," he said. "Allow me to apologize for the unwitting discourtesy we have shown you. Perhaps you will favor me by coming up? Thank you!"

He raised the lamp so that Ormerod could see his way, while de Morbecque, Jenkins and Cabot stood back against the wall.

"Shall I see you again?" Ormerod inquired as he passed his friends.

"If you care to," returned the Bostonian curtly. "I've been telling the colonel how you saved us from Spencer, and what it seems to imply. I don't choose to say behind your back what I would not to your—"

"There, there," Walker interrupted almost sharply, "I am sure Mr. Ormerod knows you to be a gentleman, Cabot. Leave the subject to me to discuss with him, if you please."

Ormerod followed Walker down the hall into as dismal a combination of bedroom, sitting-room and office as he had ever seen. The furniture was either cheap makeshift or the crazy stuff that was sent by shiploads around the Horn. A few clothes hung from nails in one wall. On a bare wooden table, which served for desk, lay a sword, a brace of revolvers, writing utensils and several orderly stacks of papers. Walker set the lamp on the table, and took a chair behind it, motioning Ormerod to a seat opposite.

"Before we speak of anything else," he said in the gentle, drawling tones Ormerod remembered so well, "I should like to clear up the implications of this encounter with Spencer. Do I understand that you had some knowledge of the reasons for his presence in Nicaragua which enabled you to bend him to your will?"

"Yes, that is true," admitted Ormerod.

"But," resumed Walker, "that you feel the knowledge you possess came to you in confidence—under circumstances, we will say, which forbid of your making use of it, except to save lives unfairly threatened?"

"That is practically what I told Cabot and Jenkins."

"Quite so! Well, sir, I am not disposed to quarrel with a man's conceptions of what his personal honor requires of him. Do I understand that you are offering to serve under me?"

"I am," answered Ormerod.

Walker's gray eyes studied him coldly for two or three moments.

"Then there is no more to be said, Mr. Ormerod. To some men I should point out the impossibility of serving my cause and at the same time—"

"I have not technically left my law firm," Ormerod interposed; "but I am taking no part in its affairs, so long as I remain with you."

"Of course, of course!" Walker seemed to deliberate. "And do you feel at liberty to inform me how Commodore Vanderbilt regards my enterprise?"

It was Ormerod, now, who scrutinized the other.

"Do you want the bare truth, Colonel?" he asked.

Walker bowed.

"He doesn't regard it seriously," said Ormerod uncomfortably.

"Ah, he considers us unworthy of notice?" inquired Walker after an appreciable pause.

"No, Colonel, I should not say that. It—it—If you don't know the Commodore, it is difficult to make you understand. But he is so used to having his own way that he has no doubt of securing whatever he wishes, no matter who is in power down here. You see, he—he has the utmost faith in the power of money."

Walker nodded thoughtfully.

"So have I. But when you speak of the power of money you speak of two things: money and the power which procured it for the possessor. If we have power here we shall have money, too. Is the Commodore likely to succeed in his plan to regain control of the Transit? I recall you were confident of his success when you were in San Francisco."

"I have no reason to change that opinion."

The filibuster's opaque, impersonal glance studied Ormerod again.

"You, it seems, do not share Commodore Vanderbilt's views, so far as we are concerned," he remarked. "Did you find New York inclined to agree with him?"

"No, sir," Ormerod denied quickly. "On the contrary. I even have a tentative offer of assistance, which I believe might be considerably augmented."

And he described his encounters with Henningsen and George Law, and also, with a humorous note, Mike Gilligan's offer. Walker heard him out with close attention.

"There are valuable possibilities in all these men," said the filibuster. "The Irish boy is typical of a class. A little success, and they will flock to us in companies. But your city loafers will require considerable training before they can be made as good troops as our Westerners. However, troops we must have, and I can not despise white men from any quarter, so long as they will fight. Mr. Law, sir, I have no doubt will help us—at a price. Colonel Henningsen I have heard of, and I will promise to welcome him whenever he sees fit to join us. He is the kind of officer I have a crying need for."

He was silent for so long that Ormerod suspected he might have forgotten his caller; but at last he spoke.

"What do you think of our position?" he demanded abruptly.

"I think you, yourself, summed up your case a moment ago, Colonel, when you said that 'a little success' would bring men to you in companies from the East," Ormerod answered deliberately. "When I left New York, remember, you were known only as having failed—at Rivas. Yet even so, some men believed in you. By now, I dare say, they will have heard of your success at Virgin Bay, and your supporters will be enormously multiplied. But still they will hang back. They will wait until you have gained another success, something more impressive even than Virgin Bay."

"You are quite right," Walker conceded. "We must have a success so impressive that it will clinch the doubters to us."

He rose and walked up and down the room with his hands clasped behind him, head sank on his chest.

"I am nearly ready for that success," he said presently. "But I must be very sure before I strike. The cholera has devastated our allies in Leon and throughout the North. In a military way they have suffered several reverses. Without me they would have been beaten months ago. As it is, whatever is done must be done by me—and alone. Alone! One hundred and ten men—and Valle's native troops. Four hundred of us, altogether. But it can be done."

He stopped by Ormerod's chair.

"You must be tired, Mr. Ormerod, and I am poor company tonight. I have much to attend to. Will you excuse me from dining with you, and join my officers downstairs? I am sure they will make you welcome."

Ormerod assented, a trifle bewildered, uncertain how he stood. In the doorway Walker halted him.

"By the way, sir, you will, of course, join my staff. I will give you rank as Captain. De Morbecque can find you a bed in this house, and you may report to me tomorrow morning. I am very glad to have you with me, and I thank you for your confidence."

There was more warmth in Walker's tone than Ormerod had ever heard. The gray eyes had kindled with the odd mesmeric light that could lure men by battalions into the valley of death.

"I am glad to be here, Colonel," replied the New Yorker.

"You will not regret coming," the filibuster assured him. And added, mildly sarcastic, "Perhaps we shall be able to teach Commodore Vanderbilt a lesson—in humility, say."

Ormerod walked downstairs in a torment of unrest. He did not like that last remark of Walker's, with its tacit admission of wounded egotism. It indicated a crack in the filibuster's mental armor, and a man of destiny could not afford that sort of thing. Whoever undervalued Vanderbilt, Ormerod knew, was risking what the Commodore would call "a tarnation good lickin'." At the stairfoot he almost decided to return and remonstrate with his new chief, but instinct bade him walk warily in these new ways his feet had found. Walker was not an easy man to handle, and a rash step might produce more harm than good. It would be advisable to await a happy conjunction of circumstance and opportunity, and then drop a diplomatic suggestion that the Commodore was an opponent deserving attentive respect and, wherever possible, was preferable as a friend.

His reflections were interrupted by a raucous burst of song on the other side of the plank partition that separated the hall from the bar:

> "Now oncët thar was a nice young man,
> And his name was Peter Gray,
> And the place whar this young man did live
> Was Penn-syl-van-i-ay."

And a thick, snarling voice he seemed to remember shouted:

"Chorus, now! And j'ine in, you lilly-livered—"

Ormerod appealed to one of the riflemen at the street door, who were both deeply interested in the concert in the bar.

"Where is the officers' mess?"

The sentry jerked his thumb toward the rear of the hall.

"But they're all in the bar jest now, stranger," he said, "ridin' herd on Tom Jenkins."

"Why, what's the matter with Tom? He came in with me—"

"Reckon you don't know Tom real intimate,'" the second rifleman disputed cheerily. "He allus gits off on a bust every so often, and it seems like he's been holdin' in a long time."

"So —— shore is a-poppin' in the bar," affirmed the other sentry. "They done took his guns off him, but the officers are watchin' to see he don't climb no passengers. You cain't tell whar Tom will stop when he gits reasonably lit."

Ormerod confided his rifle and bag to the charge of the two, and thrust his way into the bar with less difficulty than might have been supposed, for all save the most hardy of the town's itinerant population had abandoned the place. Tom Jenkins leaned against the splintery counter, his face hideously congested, mouth twisted awry. As Ormerod entered he tossed down a glass of whisky, smashed the empty glass on the counter, and announced:

"Chorus! Now, j'ine in, you yaller-bellied, ornery, gold-scratchin' back-sliders that cain't find Californy good enough to stay in. J'ine in!"

His voice rose in a parody of song:

> "Blow, ye winds of morning,
> Blow, ye winds, heigh-ho,
> Blow, ye winds of morning,
> Blow, blow, blow."

In a group on either side of the scout, immobile, but alert, Ormerod saw Cabot, Hornsby, de Morbecque and several more, whose belted swords proclaimed their rank. They did not see the New Yorker because their eyes were glued on Jenkins, ready to leap on him at the first hostile move he made against an individual; but the scout recognized Ormerod in the middle of his next verse:

> "Now, Peter, he did fall in love,
> All with a nice young—

"—— my soul to glory, if 'taint Pete, hisself!" he roared. "And I been singin' about a Pete. Come on over, Pete, you that ain't in the song. Come on over, and have a drink, and I'll l'arn you the song."

He staggered out into the room, and Hornsby, who made to stop him, dropped back at a word from Cabot.

"I don't mind the drink," said Ormerod good-naturedly, suffering Jenkins to grab his arm, "but I'm more hungry than anything else, Tom. Won't you join me in some food?"

"Food?" snarled the scout. "Don't talk like a baby! Licker is what we need, kegs o' licker. You come along, and I'll l'arn you more o' drinkin', Pete."

"One drink," replied Ormerod. "That's all."

The scout swayed against him, features wrenched into a horrible mask of passion.

"You tryin' to stop my licker, you —— Yankee? You—"

Hornsby moved a step forward, the other officers with him; but Ormerod cut off Jenkins in the full tide of his denunciation. The New Yorker's hand riveted down on the drunkard's lean shoulder and swung him face to face.

"Are you my friend, Tom?" he asked sternly.

"Friend? Friend? Depends on me'n my licker. Depends on you'n—"

"Liquor's got nothing to do with it," insisted Ormerod. "Have I been a friend to you or haven't I?"

Jenkins twisted to escape the iron grip on his shoulder, but Ormerod had twice his strength.

"Now, now, Tom," he argued. "Are you my friend—or aren't you? Have I been your friend—"

"Saved my life, —— you," admitted Jenkins sullenly.

"What are you sore about, then?"

"Want my licker."

"You can have your liquor—only, eat some dinner with it."

The scout shuffled his feet nervously, the anger charring out of his face.

"Mebbe I will," he agreed in something like his normal voice. "If you'll come along, Pete, and see I git my licker like I oughter."

"It's a deal," confirmed Ormerod. "Are you with us, gentlemen?"

Hornsby smiled.

"We are, Mr. Ormerod—and very hungry, too."

In the mess-room behind the bar Cabot came to Ormerod's side after he had placated Jenkins anew by drinking with him.

"You are the only man who ever stopped Tom without a fight," he said. "But for ——'s sake, watch out, if you ever try it again. If he's armed, he'll shoot you down without compunction. The man's insane in these fits."

"And the colonel doesn't check him?"

"He would, if he was around, yes. Even when he's drunk Tom will obey the colonel. But anybody else— Well, watch out, Ormerod."

"I can handle him," Ormerod rejoined confidently. "The main thing is not to be afraid of him."

"Humph," grunted Cabot. "Are you joining us? I hope my report on you didn't prejudice the colonel. I made it as favorable as I could."

"Thanks, I appreciate that. I go on the staff—captain."

"That's good." Cabot raised his voice. "Gentlemen! May I present to you Captain Ormerod, of the staff? Let's drink to him with a long hip-hip and whisky clear!"

"Shore," hiccoughed Jenkins. "Whisky cl'ar. 'S a good tenderfoot, Pete is—gittin' kind o' callous, at that."

Hornsby's voice mastered the confusion of applause.

"We greet you as a brother officer and adventurer, Captain Ormerod. You come to us well recommended—by your own conduct. Gentlemen of the *Falange Americana*, I give you Captain Ormerod. Bumpers! Bottoms up!"

"Hic—hic—bottoms up!" echoed Jenkins.

They cheered him, and Ormerod marveled at the elation he felt. A captain in an army of one hundred and ten men!

VII

HIS first week of service was disappointing to Ormerod in its monotonous routine of drafting orders and decrees, sitting on courts martial and fiscal, studying means for increasing the meager revenues of the port, arguing with recalcitrant tax-payers, adjusting differences between merchants and soldiers. But one morning when he knocked on Walker's door, and was bidden to enter, he found his chief talking with a native, in the stained garments and rope-sandals of a small cultivator, who sat nonchalantly, familiarity not justified by his appearance.

"Good morning, Captain," said Walker. "This gentleman is Don Rafael Canedo, a cousin of our friend, de Avila. He has been to Granada in disguise, and brings intelligence which determines me to strike for that success we discussed recently. I wish you would get the troops under arms. We shall march at once."

Ormerod veiled his astonishment as well as he could.

"To Rivas, Colonel?" he ventured to ask.

"To Virgin Bay," Walker answered shortly. "I do not wish it known generally, sir, but my objective is Granada. The Legitimists look for us to attack Rivas. They are not expecting us at Granada, which Don Rafael informs me is lightly garrisoned."

Canedo nodded confirmation of this statement.

"If we take Granada we cut the heart out of the Legitimists," he said in English as pure as the Americans'. "Or it would be truer to say we paralyze their brains, for their principal political leaders are there, and should fall into our hands."

Ormerod looked at him curiously. He was a young man, the New Yorker's age, indeed, with the dark pallor and clear-cut features of the pure Spanish stock, intellectual, in no way effeminate, but with a fineness of edge that bespoke overbreeding, perhaps inbreeding.

"It means all or nothing," said Ormerod doubtfully.

"Precisely, sir," confirmed Walker. "And I will have the long roll beaten at once."

Ormerod understood that his advice was not required. He saluted, turned on his heel and withdrew.

In the street outside he came upon Norris, the drummer of the *Falange*, and gave him Walker's order. And a moment later the shuddering roll of the drum crashed and reverberated from wall to wall. The Nicaragua drummers in Valle's camp took up the summons, and sent it thundering back, and then the hoarse braying of a trumpet clamored the old Spanish call "To horse!" to the lancers.

The troops poured into the street, and the townsfolk after them to see what was up. A detail of artillerymen dragged out the iron six-pounder and the brass two-pounder which constituted their park, and a little troop of *carreteros* mustered the train which conveyed the baggage, scanty stores and spare ammunition. Five minutes after the last drum-beat had echoed over the harbor Walker descended to the street to face his little force drawn up in marching array, Valle's lancers in the van, then the three companies of the *Falange*, then the artillery and baggage train, and the Nicaraguan infantry bringing up the rear.

"That was well done, gentlemen," he said to the officers who advanced to meet him. "Norris, we must organize a band for you. You shall be drum-major."

The drummer had just tossed his instrument into one of the baggage-wagons, and retrieved his rifle.

"Why, I'm a heap obleeged to you, Colonel," he answered bashfully. "But I don't aim to be a drummer or a drum-major any longer'n you kin git to fix it to git some one else."

"You are a splendid drummer, my boy," replied Walker, amused. "Don't you like it?"

"Well, Colonel, sir," said Norris, "in every battle scene thar's always a drummer-boy dead in the pictur'—and if it's all the same to you, I'd ruther take my chance with a rifle."

There was a roar of laughter from the assembled officers.

"Maybe you are right," returned Walker. "We'll see what can be done about it. But personally, Norris, I don't think a dead drummer-boy is essential to any battle."

He turned to the officers.

"We take the Virgin Bay road. There is no hurry, as I have information the Legitimists are safe in Rivas."

Canedo rode with Walker and the staff at the head of the column; he made an early opportunity to range himself beside Ormerod.

"I have heard my cousins speak of you, Mr. Ormerod," he said courteously. "They will be pleased to learn that you have cast in your lot with us."

"You left them well?" Ormerod questioned eagerly.

"Yes, and laboring without stint." A shadow crossed Canedo's expressive face. "If there were more like them we Nicaraguans would not have to call in the Americans to save our country."

"You must have lived abroad?" remarked Ormerod, sensing a jarring note in the other's voice.

"I was secretary to Don Jaime in London and Washington."

"But you were not in San Francisco—"

"No, I was a captain under General Jêrez in the siege of Granada." And after an interval, he continued somberly, "A poor business, abominably mismanaged."

"This time, I hope, we shall do better," returned Ormerod cheerfully.

Canedo frowned and eyed him darkly.

"Being Americans, no doubt you will," he said. "We are a poor lot, we Nicaraguans." And then, almost threateningly: "But it is our country, sir. Ours!"

The anguish in the Nicaraguan's voice aroused Ormerod's sympathy.

"Beyond question, Captain Canedo," he agreed. "And your Indians can not be raised in one generation from the level of bondsmen to free citizens."

"No more than could your negroes," rejoined Canedo as somberly as before. "But we have a saying: '*Si Dios quierre*'. It applies, sir. And though we seem blind and incurably heedless, you mistake us if you do not credit us with a patriotic ardor equal to any people's. Give us time. And we will not be slaves!"

He touched his horse with the spur and cantered ahead to where Walker rode in converse with old Valle. Ormerod watched him with some bewilderment. There had been a disturbing hint of hostility in the man's attitude. Behind his words had lurked always that threat which had emerged clearly in the assertion: "But it is our country, sir. Ours!"

"Well, for that matter, so it is, until somebody else conquers it," ruminated Ormerod. "Shall I repeat it to the colonel? No, I'd be a fool for my pains. He doesn't want interference unless he asks for it—had my toes stepped on once today. No, let well enough alone."

The march to Virgin Bay was uneventful. They arrived at the lake port shortly after twilight, and Walker's first move was to post a heavy cordon of sentries around the village and to occupy the Transit wharf in force. An hour or two later the lights of the lake steamer *Virgen* were seen approaching from San Carlos, and Walker sent out a boatload of men under Hornsby to take possession of her. Cushing, the superintendent of the Transit, protested vigorously against this step, claiming the vessel was under the American flag; but Walker promptly demolished this argument by a quotation from international law, and referred Cushing to Ormerod for a corroborative opinion. Cushing, of course, knew who Ormerod was, and was no less taken aback by the circumstance than was Ormerod, himself, who did not relish being compelled to support the requisition of Transit property. But as a lawyer he knew Walker was entirely in the right, and was compelled to inform Cushing so.

"Your steamers are navigating inland waterways of the republic of Nicaragua," he said. "It is no more possible for them to claim American registry than it would be for one of George Law's Hudson River boats to set up as a British vessel."

The Transit superintendent shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"If you say so, Mr. Ormerod, I suppose there's no use to persist any further; but I'd just like to ask you this: Do Mr. Vanderbilt or Mr. Garrison or Mr. Morgan or any of the other gentlemen who are interested in the company know about this?"

Ormerod hesitated.

"So far as I know, they do not," he answered finally.

"Well, sir, it's very odd, your being here, and—"

"My being here has nothing to do with the affairs of any of those gentlemen. I am simply a subordinate of Colonel Walker."

"Well, it's all very strange," grumbled Cushing. "As an American, I'm glad to see anything done that may end this —— fighting. Between ourselves, I'd like to see the whole country Americanized. But I simply can't afford to be placed in the position of assisting Democrats against Legitimists."

"You are yielding to force, Mr. Cushing," interposed Walker. "Likewise, I can assure you that in a very few days the Legitimist Party will cease to exist as a military agency."

"I hope so, I'm sure, Colonel Walker," Cushing replied doggedly. "But just the same, I must protest against your action, and I hope you'll bear me out in future that I did so, and not let it be said that the Transit Company helped you of its own accord."

"You need not be concerned," promised Walker. "I will see that justice is done you."

In the morning the work of transferring the troops and stores aboard the *Virgen* was begun, and consumed the rest of the day. Of the horses only two were taken with the expedition for the use of Valle, who was too fat to walk easily, and Gilman, who was hampered by his wooden leg. The rest of the column's stock was turned into the Transit corral. If the venture was successful, they could easily be recovered.

If it was defeated, they would be of no use to the column at the upper end of the lake.

At half past four in the afternoon the *Virgen* sailed, and as her bow swung north under the stupendous bulk of Ometepec a hoarse cheer went up from her crowded decks, for the rank and file, Americans as well as natives, now knew the purpose of the voyage. They were not to attack San Carlos and Castillo Viejo, as one rumor had affirmed; neither were they to make a feint, and then come down on Rivas, a few miles inland from the lake. No, they were for Granada. The shrill voices of the Nicaraguans and the deep, resonant roar of the Americans mingled in one shout of defiance.

Standing on the upper deck by the pilot-house watching a mob of Nicaraguans clustered about the massive figure of old Valle, ensconced on a forecastle bollard, Ormerod felt a pressure on his shoulders and looked around to meet the quizzical glance of Cabot and the lean, wind-burned visage of Tom Jenkins.

" 'Rum feller, the Hemperor,' " muttered Cabot, flirting an eyebrow in the direction of the pilot-house, where Walker sat. "What d'you think of all this, my boy? Or can't an officer of the staff say what he thinks?"

"It isn't for a raw recruit to say what he thinks," retorted Ormerod. "What do you think, Tom?"

"Wa'al," drawled the scout, "Kit Carson allus used to say, 'Find out whar t'other feller is, then make him think you ain't whar you are' and go for him. Seems to me that's about what the colonel's up to. Mebbe we won't take Granada, but I bet you we give the Legitimists the skeer o' their lives."

"It's an original plan," said Ormerod.

"Original!" grunted Cabot. "The Chief is always original."

"He's a nachrul born fightin' man," asserted Jenkins. " 'Never knowed his kind not to do the right thing."

"And what's that?" queried Ormerod.

"Go for the feller yo're fightin'," Jenkins answered succinctly. "Fight him 'till he's wore out."

"I don't know but that was the secret of Napoleon," reflected Cabot. "Von Ritterstein claims the best defense is to attack."

"Even the Injuns know that," growled Jenkins.

"But what will we do—afterwards?" asked Ormerod.

"If we're licked?" returned Jenkins.

"No, if we win."

"That's like trying to see over Ometepec, there," jeered Cabot. "It don't pay, my friend. You can only see so far."

"But the Nicaraguans—the Democrats—will they—"

"They'll fall on our necks. Didn't they ask us down here? Don't we each of us get a *ranchero* out of this, besides pay?"

"I wonder!" said Ormerod.

"Why, the Administration at Washington will jump to support us," asserted the ex-cabby. "Did you ever know an American Government that wouldn't uphold any chance to grab fresh territory?"

"Manifest destiny, eh?" retorted Ormerod.

"Just that!"

Jenkins leaned over Ormerod's shoulder to discharge a stream of tobacco-juice overside.

"You never kin tell about these yere greasers," he said. "But thar ain't no argyment kin beat the six-shooter, boys. Plenty o' white men, plenty o' shootin' irons—that's yore answer."

VIII

AS NIGHT fell all the necessary lights on the *Virgen* were shrouded, and the canvas side-curtains were let down from the roof of the upper deck. Strict silence was maintained, and when the lights of Granada were sighted about nine o'clock the steamer headed out into the lake, in order not to risk betraying her presence by a stray flash from the fireroom or a spark from the funnel. She continued on past the city, and dropped anchor at ten o'clock some three miles to the north of it. The disembarkation of the troops commenced immediately, but it was a tedious undertaking because of the darkness and the fact that they had only one small boat, a clumsy iron launch, which was so heavy that it was necessary to rig a cable from the *Virgen* to a tree above the beach, so that the boatmen could pull themselves back and forth by it.

Three o'clock was gone before all were ashore, and the order of march was formed as expeditiously as the thickness of the forest trees and the darkness would permit.

Of the Nicaraguan officers, Canedo was reputed best acquainted with the surroundings of Granada, but he admitted that he was more or less helpless while the night lasted, and the column blundered for several hours through the undergrowth of the woods which grew into the suburbs on this side of the city. But with the coming of the dawnlight he secured his bearings, and led them at a trot out of the forest and into the road which ran from the city to Los Cocos.

The *Falange* was in advance, headed by Walker on foot; after the Americans marched the Nicaraguans, under Valle, who swayed in his saddle, grunting and groaning from his efforts, but keeping up a flood of grim jests which heartened his own men and drew grins from the Americans who could not understand them. They had not advanced far along the Los Cocos road when they began to overtake market people on their way into the city to sell their wares. And they were within half a mile of the outskirts when suddenly the bells of all the churches broke forth in a mighty din, clanging and banging for miles over mountains and lake.

"By God, they've discovered us!" exclaimed Hornsby.

"The tocsin," cried de Morbecque.

Walker, alone, refused to look downcast.

"That does not sound like the tocsin, gentlemen," he said. "What do you make of it, Captain Canedo?"

"It sounds like a peal of joy," he answered blankly, "but this is no saint's day."

"Ask one of the market venders we just passed," suggested Ormerod.

Canedo hailed a farmer and his son, who cowered by the roadside, expecting to have their wares confiscated and, perhaps, be forced into the Democratic platoons. They answered, and the Nicaraguan shook his head dolefully.

"It is not because of us," he explained; "but it is bad news nevertheless. They ring to celebrate a victory which the Legitimists gained over our people at Puebla Nuevo."

"All the more reason for us to win, gentlemen," exclaimed Walker briskly. "Close up, men! We'll have those bells ringing for us before we are finished this morning."

A cheer responded to him, and the *Falange* shifted to the quick-step, discarding blanket rolls and packs as they advanced. Houses showed in the trees to right and left, the road broadened, became more substantial, and they rounded a bend and saw a barricade confronting them. A startled sentry peered over its parapet, howled one frantic "*Alerte!*"—discharged his piece and fled. Jenkins shot him down from the bulwark he had just deserted, and as scores of little brown men in tattered white uniforms burst out of the neighboring houses, the ripple of rifle-fire swelled to a crackling rhythm of explosions, like the tearing of a sheet of canvas an inch through, Ormerod thought, listening to his first fusillade.

In the rear they could hear the excited yelps of their native allies, pressing after them, and as anxious to close as the Americans. In front they met with no resistance until they approached the Plaza, when a spatter of shots saluted them from the vast old fortress monastery of San Francisco; but the well aimed fire of the riflemen routed their enemies from the roof and windows of the building, and they drove on into the Plaza, capturing cannon at several barricades and scooping in three or four hundred prisoners who broke in a panic out of the *cuartel*, the Government House and the massive churches that frowned over the wide paved area that was the city's military stronghold.

Stopping to catch his breath in the middle of the Plaza, Ormerod discovered to his amazement that Granada was won. It seemed incredible. An hour ago they had been blundering around in the forest. Now, they were in the Legitimist capital. They had more prisoners to guard than there were effectives in their own ranks. All over the square Americans and Democrats were lining up squads of Legitimists, collecting muskets. In front of the Government House, Valle and a number of his men were knocking the shackles from a party of Democratic prisoners they had found on the point of marching out to clean the streets. Near-by a dozen or more well-dressed civilians were huddled against the wall of the parochial church. Canedo, passing Ormerod pointed at them gleefully.

"I said we'd paralyze the brains of the Legitimists," he called. "There are the best politicians in their party."

Looking about for Walker, Ormerod heard his own name shouted, and saw the filibuster chief under an arcade in front of a

row of shops, with his sword-point pressed to the breast of one of their native infantrymen.

"Find Valle and fetch him here," called Walker.

With some difficulty, Ormerod extricated the fat lancer from his congenial occupation of releasing prisoners, who all seemed to be his most intimate friends, and led him at a waddle across the Plaza to where Walker stood grimly, pinning the dazed little Democrat against the shop-wall.

"This man has been looting, Chelon," denounced Walker.

With the muzzle of his revolver, held in his left hand, he indicated a heap of articles at the man's feet.

"Oh, no, *mi general*," denied Valle, "he 'ave not loot. He jus' take what he need frrom these Legitimist'. What ees Legitimist ees our', eh? *Bueno!* We make them weep."

"There will be no looting in my command," stated Walker coldly.

His eyes riveted the lancer's.

"Hereafter any man of mine caught in the act, or with property which can be proved to have been looted, will be hung—forthwith."

"But thees ees madness," cried Valle. "What ees warr eef you do not take frrom your enemy? What ees Legitimist ees—"

"You heard me, Colonel Valle. I will hang any men, including yourself, caught looting. That is all. Ormerod, take a squad of our men and patrol the Plaza for looters."

A score or so of the native troops were apprehended in the act, but on Valle's hysterical representation that they could have known nothing of Walker's order, Ormerod decided there was no need for more drastic treatment than a warning and enforced restitution to their victims. He had recently cleaned up their task when he heard a loud voice remonstrating belligerently in an obviously English accent.

"It's an outrage, I say! I'll have the West India Squadron here in no time, you Yankee rascals. —— it, sir, let go of me! I'll complain to my consul. I'll—"

And around a corner appeared the Honorable Billy Webster, not yet shaven, his night-shirt tucked promiscuously into his pantaloons and his face ruddy with *aguardiente* and rage. Cabot had him by one arm and Jenkins by the other.

"Look what we found," invited the Bostonian. "Isn't it pretty. It was running like a gazelle—straight for Masaya—when we caught it. Won't it look genteel in front of a firing squad?"

Webster shrieked with fear and resentment.

"You'll pay for this, both of you! Yes, and your tuppenny—ha'penny colonel! Colonel of a mob of thieves, by——"

Jenkins gave his arm an expert twist.

"That's yore talk, mister," said the scout as he squealed. "Yo're done."

Ormerod fell into step beside them.

"Did you expect to be treated gently, Mr. Webster, when you are known to be a Legitimist spy?" he asked.

"I am a British secret-service agent," moaned Webster. "Ouch! I won't say any more!"

"Where is Spencer?" demanded Ormerod.

"Where you won't—Ouch! Ouch! I don't know."

Ormerod considered.

"See here, Tom," he said, and drew the scout out of earshot. "Don't handle him too roughly. We'd better take him to the colonel."

"I'm agreeable," drawled Jenkins, "but what's the idee in ridin' him easy, Pete? He's p'ison, that feller is."

"He's English, too, Tom. We can't afford to bring down the English on us. Come along, and we'll settle this."

They tracked Walker down in the Audience Room of the Government House. Mr. Wheeler, the American Minister, a stout, oratorically-inclined North Carolinian, who talked in rolling sentences, was concluding an assertion to the effect that "this is entirely unofficial as yet, Colonel Walker, entirely unofficial and without instructions from the State Department. But by —— sir, you are a man after my own heart, sir! An American, sir! And I wish to tell you, sir, that you have performed a deed the fame of which shall ring from one end of the Union to the other. You have my congratulations, Colonel Walker. Command me in anything. Between us, perhaps, we can put this miserable country to rights."

Walker's low-voiced reply was inaudible, but Wheeler left him glistening with emotion and perspiration. And the American Minister's place was taken by a tall, bulky prelate, who was introduced by Canedo as Padre Vigil, the Curate of the City. He

complimented Walker for the gentleness which the conquerors had shown, and pledged himself to do whatever he could to bring the warring parties to terms. Him, too, Walker thanked, and as he withdrew Ormerod saw his chance, and led forward Jenkins and Cabot, with their prisoner.

"Here is Webster, Spencer's accomplice, sir," he said quietly. "He was taken as he endeavored to escape from the city toward the North."

Walker shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"The man is a notorious spy, Captain Ormerod. He can be shot without trial in the circumstances. Technically, the city is under martial law."

Ormerod stepped closer to his chief.

"My advice may not be welcome, sir," he said, "but I should like to point out to you that however notorious the man may be he is a British subject and, we have reason to believe, a British spy, no less than a Legitimist."

"You do not need to convict him to me," said Walker frigidly.

"I am not trying to convict him. I am saying that it is the part of policy to send him out of the country."

The gray eyes smote Ormerod with an icy impact.

"You were not requested to give your advice, sir."

"I am aware of that," said Ormerod, undaunted. "But the success of this enterprise is as dear to me as to you, and I should not be doing my duty to you and our cause if I did not—"

"Very well, very well, Captain Ormerod." Walker made an impatient gesture. "In short, you think we should bring down more trouble upon ourselves than the rascal's punishment would be worth?"

"I do."

"What would you do with him?"

"Ship him out of the country at the earliest opportunity."

Walker deliberated for several moments.

"You are right, Captain Ormerod. I am obliged to you." The freckled face warmed. "I do not permit many men to advise me, uninvited, but it seems I must admit you to that circle."

Ormerod turned to order the disposition of the prisoner, and started to leave the audience chamber after Jenkins and Cabot, but Walker halted him.

"Were you able to stop the looting, Captain Ormerod?"

"Yes, sir."

"Without any executions?"

"It was not necessary, sir."

"Very good." The implacable light shone again in the opaque gray eyes. "But be good enough to remember that we are engaged in a desperate enterprise. We can not tarry to weigh human life indefinitely. And above all, we must have order and obedience. I propose to enforce my authority at any cost."

"Yes, sir," answered Ormerod, seeing that an answer was required.

"I speak to you in this vein, Captain Ormerod," pursued Walker, "because you are blessed, or it may be, burdened, with a legal mind. I happen to have one myself, with which my soldier's instinct must be forever struggling. Don't let it master you. A good officer must be ruthless."

"So must a good judge," retorted Ormerod.

"Ah, but we are not judges, you and I! We are backsliding lawyers—and that is a very different thing, sir."

Outside in the Plaza again this conversation recurred to Ormerod as he encountered Norris, the drummer, contemplating a shabby white corpse, half-covered by the kettledrum slung over one shoulder.

"What did I tell you and the colonel, Cap'n?" Norris hailed him. "Did you ever see a battle scene without a dead drummer up in front? And by hokey, sir, if the only man lost on our side wasn't this pore leettle greaser of Valle's! I'm gittin' rid o' that drum o' mine afore the next battle, you bet!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Sentence

by Fiswoode Tarleton

Author of "Corn," "Carnival," etc.

DEL PANSEY was making furniture for mountain folks on his mountain lathe in the glen near his cabin at the end of the big ridge. Bristling with mountain laurel, hickory and cucumber-trees, the big ridge dipped down to Cone Mountain. Pansey's foot worked the treadle that was roped to a bowed sapling, spinning the table-leg he was polishing in the lathe.

The zizzing sound the sandpaper made against the table-leg he was polishing and the creakings of the sapling that played up and down drowned out the call that came from the laurel scrub back of him. A chip of wood flew past his head. Another struck him on the back. He took his foot off the treadle and looked around.

"Del!"

A voice said it from the laurel scrub somewhere. It came again, and then a face was framed in the scrub; a whiskered face that held burrs in it. A hatless head full of burrs and twig ends came out of the scrub. Quick, flashing eyes in the head looked searchingly around the glen, sweeping the laurel fringe that bordered the little clearing where Pansey's lathe was. The blood left Pansey's face and little shakes came to his body.

The head in the laurel scrub made a motion that meant Pansey was to come closer, and his legs moved unsteadily over nearer the head.

"Lissen, Del!" The head came farther out of the brush as Pansey drew nearer to it and the eyes, with quick darts, looked around the clearing once more. "Broke jail las' night, Del, an' I been dodgin' 'till I'm most in. Tha sheriff an' his deputy an' two pro'bition men er beatin' up tha hills fer me an' I cain't git tuh my folks 'till dark, cain't risk a-makin' hit home 'till then. Anywhar yuh kin stick me away 'till night? An' I hain't had nothin' tuh eat."

Pansey wasn't shaking any more, and the blood came back to his face. He stepped closer still to the man hidden in the scrub. Cal Ricket, hiding there in the scrub, didn't know then who it was that got the fifty dollars reward for tipping off The Pentecostal Temperance League that it was Cal Ricket who had been peddling moonshine liquor in Leeston. Cal Ricket didn't know who it was that put the black pencil mark on the county map for the Pentecostals and the prohibition men two weeks before in the court-house at Leeston, showing them where the Ricket still was in the hills. Cal Ricket didn't know it was Pansey who did these things because he was asking Pansey to take him in and hide him until night.

"Kin yuh stick me in somewhar, Del?"

Pansey was jerked out of himself.

"Course, Cal. Le's see." Pansey scratched his beard and pulled at his upper lip while Cal Ricket's eyes swept the laurel scrub again. "Better come tuh my shack, Cal, an' see ef I kin think somethin' out," said Pansey. "We'd better go seprate, you a-crawlin' on yore belly an' me a-walkin' ahead like nothin's up. Me a-carryin' a table-leg like I was a-goin' tuh my shack on business. Yuh cain't see much o' my shack from anywhar, but jest tha same keep on yore belly. Better begin a-crawlin' now, Cal."

The head full of burrs and twig ends drew into the brush, and Pansey picked up a table-leg near his lathe and started down a path through the brush, the path he had made by coming every day from his cabin to his lathe. When Pansey came out on to the little open space before his cabin, Cal Ricket was wriggling along the ground on his belly toward the cabin door, wriggling a few feet and then stopping to listen and look around. When Cal Ricket wriggled over the stoop and was inside the cabin, Pansey closed the door and lifted up some loose boards from the floor of the cabin. He pulled out a jug from a hole under the floor and handed it to Cal Ricket, who drank.

Cal Ricket's hands shook and his teeth ticked against the mouth of the jug.

Pansey stood studying while Cal Ricket drank. In a minute he said:

"Only place ef tha sheriff an' them come, Cal, is under tha floor. Hain't likely they'll go a-snoopin' in tha cabin ef they find me at tha lathe an' I tell 'em I hain't seen nothin' o' yuh. Jest tha same, though, ef tha sheriff an' them come, git under tha floor. Course hit's tight a-lyin' thar."

"Don't mind hit," Cal Ricket said. "Ef they git me again hit'll be bread and water 'till my hearin' comes 'roun'."

"When's yore hearin', Cal?"

"Nex' week." Cal Ricket frowned and scratched his head. "Tha skunk that tol' them Pentecostals an' federal fellers 'bout my still'll shore git his'n ef my folks find him out. Huh!"

The blood left Pansey's face again and he turned his face toward the cabin window away from Cal Ricket.

"Hain't possible fer them federal men tuh know whar my layout was 'less they was told. An' how'd tha Pentecostals know hit was me a-peddlin' licker in Leeston. Somethin' funny 'bout hit."

Pansey looked down at the hole under the floor.

"Reckon yuh better git under thar quick ef tha sheriff an' them come. Thar's some cold victuals on tha shelf thar in tha corner. Yuh shore want tuh take that jug under tha floor with yuh ef yuh crawl in, Cal. I'll jest go back tuh my work. Course I hain't seen nary a hair o' yuh ef anybody comes a-snoopin' aroun'."

"Course I'll be out o' here when night comes," said Cal Ricket. "Huh! Jest let me git over tha little ridge to my folks an' I reckon tha sheriff an' them'll hunt some time afore they git me ag'in. Jest let me git thar. I'm shore obliged tuh yuh, Del."

"Glad tuh do hit, Cal." Pansey stepped over to the door. "Keep tha door closed, Cal, an' keep yore ears open. Don' fall tuh sleep."

"Huh! I reckon thar's no sleep in me."

Cal Ricket put his mouth to the jug once more and Pansey went out, closing the cabin door. He went down the path to his lathe.

The zizzing and the creaking drifted around the glen again, stirred up chickadees in the laurel scrub, made the chickadees fly to the swamp magnolia and the cucumber-tree.

Pansey's thoughts spun in his head. When the Leeston authorities got Cal Ricket in jail, why didn't they keep him there? It wasn't Pansey's job to keep telling where Cal Ricket was. Why did Cal Ricket have to come to Pansey to be put away until night? Why was Cal Ricket thrown back on Pansey's hands?

AFTER a while, when Pansey had polished the table-legs, he sat down on the ground to fit them into the top of the table, the table one of the hill women was going to pay him three dollars for. When he was fitting in the last leg, sounds held his arms poised, sounds coming from somewhere beyond the brush in the direction of the big ridge slope. Twigs were cracking and feet were crunching the stub and brush. No voices came yet, though; just cracks and crunchings sounded nearer.

Four men stepped suddenly out of the brush and came toward Pansey.

"Morning."

All the men said it, echoing one another, and they sat down on the chip-covered ground near Pansey and his lathe—the two federal men who got Pansey to make the pencil dot on the county map, the new sheriff from Leeston and his deputy. The prohibition men wore white collars and coats; cadaverous, thin-lipped prohibition men, solemn men with holy eyes looking up at the sky. The sheriff from Leeston and his deputy didn't wear coats and their stars shone on their shirts. Floyd Jett, the sheriff, who wasn't afraid of mountain men, looked as long as a tree on the ground.

"How's furniture makin', Pansey?" The sheriff looked at Pansey.

The look that the sheriff gave Pansey said he wasn't thinking about furniture though. The look made Pansey feel small and the sheriff seem bigger. The eyes of the sheriff were clear and steady and without hate or malice in them; eyes of a man who was white. All the mountain men knew Sheriff Jett was white. Never went back on his word, never bullied, but had his way. What was it, then, in Sheriff Jett's eyes that made Pansey want to twist and squirm there on the ground? Why did Sheriff Jett's look turn Pansey's eyes toward the brush when he answered him?

"Course I keep a-makin' a li'l furniture, Sheriff. Jest a-finishin' up the table thar. One of tha Cone Mountain women gits hit. How's things in Leeston?"

"Quiet-like, except a fellow broke jail last night. Reckon he had some outside help. Guess his folks slipped him a file with some victuals."

"Anybody from roun' tha ridge?" Pansey asked.

"Well, yes. I guess you'd say Cal Ricket's one of the ridge boys. Little Ridge, that is."

"Cal Ricket! Yuh don't say!"

Pansey threw a glance at the sheriff and looked up at the sky.

"Yep. His hearin' was to come up next week." Sheriff Jett straightened up. "The Pentecostal crowd's hustled and already offered another reward for him. Want to make an example of him, I reckon."

"So does the Government want to make an example of him." One of the prohibition men said it and got up from his seat on the ground. "No use staying here, Sheriff."

All the men got up and stretched and started ahead through the brush, but when the sheriff turned around to look at Pansey, Pansey's eyes were talking, his eyes were telling the sheriff to stop. The sheriff said something in the ears of his deputy. The deputy and the prohibition men sat down in the brush. When the brush engulfed the other three men, the sheriff returned to Pansey's lathe and sat down with him on the ground.

Pansey put a finger to his lips and, as the sheriff nodded, Pansey motioned toward his cabin with his head. Then he brushed aside the shavings and sawdust on the ground and on the bare earth he drew a square with the sharp end of a chip of wood. He drew a picture of a chair in one corner of the square and a bunk in the other corner, and he drew a stove between the two. In the middle of the square he dug a hole and over the hole he laid strips of wood. The sheriff nodded again and Pansey covered the drawing he had made in the ground with chips and sawdust. But the sheriff swept the place bare again. Then he took a chip and dug the dollar sign deep into the ground.

The sweat was standing on Pansey's forehead. The sheriff sat still, not looking at Pansey but up at the crest of the big ridge, the crest of the big ridge just showing over the tops of the laurel trees where a hawk was poised against the sky. A flicker of a smile twisted the sheriff's lips as he watched the hawk. In a minute the sheriff rose and asked for a drink of water, but he didn't look at Pansey.

"Want me tuh fetch hit, Sheriff?" Pansey said it loudly.

The sheriff shook his head and motioned for Pansey to go ahead. When Pansey started ahead of him, the sheriff followed, shaking his head.

Pansey led the way through the path that ran from his lathe to his cabin through the brush, the sheriff following close with the muzzle of his carbine pointed ahead of him. When they entered the cabin, the sheriff filled a cup with water from a bucket on the floor and drank. Then he sat down on Pansey's bunk. Pansey sat down on a chair in the corner across from him.

The silence in the cabin made Pansey squirm and pull at his whiskers. Pansey didn't know what to say. Why didn't Sheriff Jett say something? The silence pressed against Pansey's ears and his heart was pounding in his head. He got up from the chair and sat down again. The creaking

of the chair broke the silence, stirred Sheriff Jett.

"How's furniture makin', Pansey?"

"Course I keep a-makin' a li'l furniture, Sheriff. Jest a-finishin' up a table. One o' tha Cone Mountain women gits hit. How's things in Leeston?"

"Quiet like."

Sheriff Jett began to sniff the air. Loud sniffs sounded all around the cabin.

"Powerful smell around here, Pansey. Smells like old whisky mash. Runnin' a still?"

"Course I hain't a-runnin' a still, Sheriff."

Pansey's mouth stayed open and he wrinkled his brow.

SHERIFF JETT rose from the bunk and walked heavily around the cabin. The sheriff looked into all the corners of the cabin. He threw aside a pile of riffraff and looked under it. Pretty soon he stepped over to the middle of the cabin and looked steadily down at the floor.

"What's under the floor?" he asked.

"Thar hain't nothin' under thar."

Pansey's fingers pulled at the knees of his jean-pants. The blood left his face.

The sheriff lowered the muzzle of his carbine so that it pointed directly down at the floor in front of him. He cocked his carbine slowly, but the faint click came across the cabin to Pansey and made him give a little jump.

"Nothin' under the floor, eh? But I say I smell mash."

With a quick bending movement the sheriff jerked up one of the loose boards of the floor. Cal Ricket raised his matted head, his head full of burrs and twig ends, and looked at the sheriff with a crooked smile on his mouth.

"Well I'll be ——!" The sheriff left his mouth open for a spell while he pointed his carbine at Cal Ricket's head. "Come out of there, Ricket. Hands first."

Cal Ricket's head pushed through the loose boards of the floor.

"Hands first, Ricket." The sheriff pressed the carbine muzzle against Cal Ricket's breast until he raised both hands out of the hole. The palms of Ricket's hands were together, and the sheriff snapped handcuffs around his wrists. The sheriff raised two more loose boards from the floor and helped Ricket out of the hole. When Ricket was on his feet he looked at the sheriff, but he didn't look at Pansey.

Sheriff Jett brushed the dirt off Ricket's jean-pants and shirt and he picked the burrs and twig ends out of his beard and head. The sheriff's voice was soft as he spoke to Cal Ricket.

"Sorry you made a break. Only makes it harder."

Pansey tried to speak soft words, too, but they came hollow across the cabin.

"Shore tough, Cal."

Hollow words from Pansey jerked Cal Ricket up and his eyes swept past Pansey to the cabin window. The crooked smile came to his face again.

Sheriff Jett suddenly went through Cal Ricket's hip pocket but there was nothing there. Cal Ricket laughed. His laugh sent lumps into Pansey's throat.

The smile left Cal Ricket's mouth and he looked straight into the sheriff's eyes.

"How'd hit come ef yuh thought thar was nothin' but ole whisky mash under tha floor yuh was so keerful tuh keep tha muzzle o' yore gun pointed down thar? What fer was yore gun cocked an' yore finger on the trigger? Jest fer ole whisky mash?"

Pansey had to swallow his lumps again, and he pulled at the knees of his jean-pants while the sheriff hunted for words. The sheriff's cheeks had red spots on them. Why didn't Sheriff Jett say something instead of just keeping his mouth open that way and scratching his head? Why didn't he tell Cal Ricket right off that he saw where he had trodden down the scrub, that he saw where the toes of Ricket's boots had made their marks dragging over the ground near the cabin door, or something like that?

But Sheriff Jett didn't say anything; just took Cal Ricket by the arm and led him out of the cabin. Pansey walked over to the door after them. Little shakes were in his legs and he leaned up against the door frame. The deputy sheriff and the two prohibition men met the sheriff and Cal Ricket at the edge of the brush. One of the prohibition men walked up to Cal Ricket and called him a dirty bootlegger. The sheriff pushed the prohibition man away roughly.

Pansey got the bucket of water and the cup from his cabin and took it out to the five men. When he asked Cal Ricket if he wanted a drink of water, he didn't answer or look at Pansey. The sheriff

and his deputy didn't want any water either, but the prohibition men drank.

The five men then started through the brush, and when Pansey could not hear crunchings any more, he went back to his cabin and pulled out the jug of whisky from under the floor. He drank until the little shakes left his body and Cal Ricket's smile went away from before his face. Then he went out to his lathe again and fitted the last leg into the table-top. He slung the table on his back and started down the glen toward Cone Mountain to the hill woman's, the hill woman who had three dollars for the table.

Returning, his long, quick mountain strides brought him to his glen, where he stopped quick as if something had hit him.

Men were in the glen. Pansey peered between the trees and saw it was three Ricket men with rifles near his cabin. They were looking up at the tree-tops, though. One of the Rickets was aiming his rifle up at the tree-top. Pansey saw a squirrel on a limb in the top of a hickory tree, heard the report of the rifle and saw the squirrel sail through the air to the ground.

Ricket boy had barked the squirrel. Pansey could see where the bark of the tree limb and a little of the wood were clipped off under where the squirrel had been lying. Bullet never touched the squirrel, but one of the Ricket boys picked him up dead.

Ricket boys wouldn't be barking squirrels if they were after Pansey. More squirrels in the trees around his cabin than anywhere else because he didn't shoot at them much. Hill men came there to shoot squirrels sometimes and leave a couple with Pansey for his pot. Most hill men shot them, though; tore them up too much. A barked squirrel is better to eat and easier to skin.

Again a Ricket gun spoke and again a squirrel sailed out of a tree-top. The Ricket boys smiled at each other, and Pansey came out on to the little clearing in front of his cabin. He called to the Ricket boys and waved his hand, but they only smiled at each other.

Pansey went into his cabin, lifted up the loose boards in the floor and felt around for his jug of whisky to take out to the Ricket boys. But the jug was not there any more. He stepped down into the hole under the floor and felt around as far as he could reach, but there was no jug. When he stood up in the hole, his eyes rested on the shelf in the corner of the cabin and saw that the shelf was bare. His victuals were gone, too. And his rifle was gone from the wall. Thieves must have been around, thieves helping themselves in cabins while folks were away. Niggers from up the valley, maybe, who were snooping around that morning and saw him shoulder his table and go away.

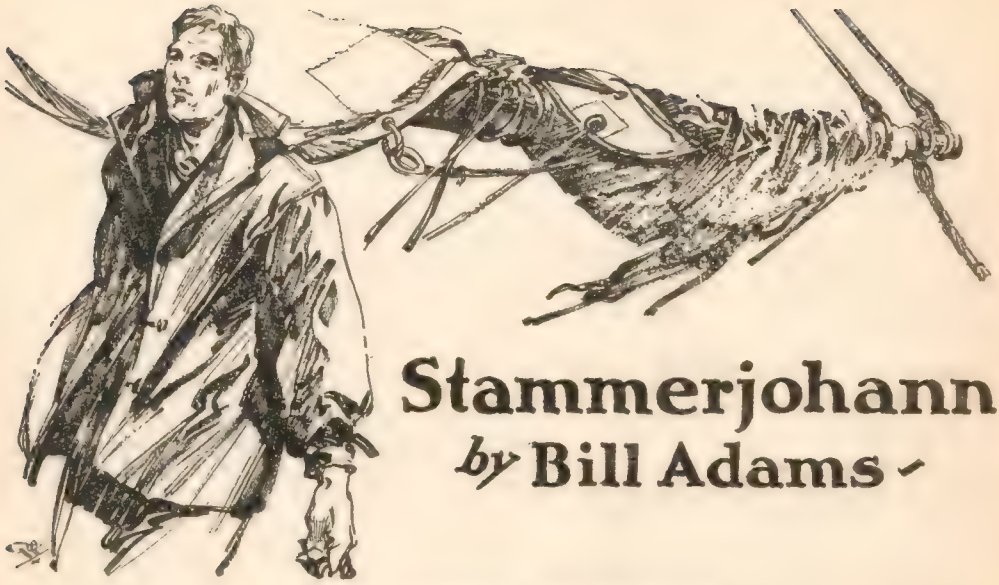
A red flush came to Pansey's face and he stepped out of the hole and over to the door to tell the Ricket boys he'd been robbed. Ricket boys were not around any more, though.

Pansey put one foot off the stoop on to the ground, and a roar came from behind a tree. A splinter from the top of the door frame fluttered to his feet. He leaped back into the cabin and slammed the door shut. The cabin was spinning around him and the blood was pounding in his head. He steadied himself against the wall, followed the wall around to his bunk and sat down heavily. His fingers pulled at the knees of his jean-pants. One of his hands slipped off his knees and his knuckles cracked against the bunk. The bunk was hard under him, his blanket and shuck mattress were gone from his bunk.

The blood hammering in Pansey's head beat time to the questions he asked himself. Why hadn't the Ricket boys shot him when he was outside, when he passed close to them on his way back from the hill woman's? The Ricket boys saw him plain. When he stood on his cabin stoop why did that bullet miss him by three feet, that bullet fired by the Ricket boy who could bark squirrels. The questions swelled in Pansey's head. He pressed his shaking hands to his head. It felt big and heavy.

The door of the cabin was being opened slowly. Pansey shrank back against the wall at the head of his bunk and prayed. When the door was open a foot, a hand pushed in a tin cup of water and set it on the cabin floor. A small square of corn pone was thrown in through the opening in the door. It broke into pieces when it struck the floor.

The door closed slowly and faint footfalls came from outside the cabin. The footfalls died abruptly. Nothing could be heard in the cabin but Pansey's quick, raucous breathing.



Stammerjohann

by Bill Adams

Author of "The Helmsman," "Solace of the Sea," etc.

STAMMERJOHANN was a pier-head "jump," one of two. The mate gave the other barely a glance, but his eyes rested a moment on Stammerjohann. Stammerjohann's cheeks were rosy, his hair butter yellow, his large eyes blue and placid.

Two of the sailors who had been signed on for the voyage had not put in an appearance when, in mid-afternoon, the ship passed from her dock into the river. Stammerjohann and the other, answering the mate's hail, climbed from the pier-head to the passing ship to take their places.

The other was a typical pier-head jump, ragged, skinny, shuffling; a bar-room hanger-on or jail-bird whom necessity had driven to the waterfront.

Stammerjohann, an inch or two better than six feet, walked direct to the mate and looked down upon him.

"Yah, meester?" said Stammerjohann.

The mate, who had seen hundreds of pier-head jumps in his time, gave him an uninterested stare and, with a gesture toward the sailors at the gear, said—

"Lay hold o' those braces!"

While Stammerjohann took his place at the end of a row of sailors who were bracing up the fore yards, the other stood leering at the mate. The mate nodded to the second mate, who lifted a rope's end from its pin and brought it sharply about the fellow's legs. The jump gave a surprized yell and, while the sailors grinned, made for the braces and took his place behind Stammerjohann, who, laying back on the ropes, paid no attention to him.

It was a rainy day, cold and windy, and the two were soon wet to the skin. The skinny jump shivered and tried to hang back from the ropes whenever he thought that neither of the mates observed him. Stammerjohann perspired and blushed when the second mate swore at him for getting hold of the wrong gear. Most of the crew were more or less drunk still. Envying them, the skinny jump sought to join in their ribaldry. Stammerjohann, head and shoulders taller than most of them, moved among them unheeding and expressionless. Until he joined the little bark that, leaky and short-handed, had put into the narrow fjord where he dwelt with his father, he had known nothing of ships. The condemning of the bark on her arrival in Hull had left him stranded. Of English he knew nothing at all.

Except for an occasional bland smile he paid no heed to his fellow. He had never seen the like before, and was not interested. When about to follow a sailor aloft to loose canvas, he was ordered by the second mate to stay on deck. The other made no move to go aloft, and was as anxious to avoid work as was Stammerjohann to find it.

"Stammerjohann," copyright, 1926, by Bill Adams.

When dark began to set in all hands were ordered to the quarterdeck for the picking of the watches.

The mate, taking first pick, chose Putman, a sea-wizened elderly sailor. The second at once picked Boyle, who all the afternoon had been the noisiest of the crew. When all the men were picked the mate looked at the big jump.

"You, what's your name?" he asked.

"Yah, meester. Stammerjohann," answered the big jump, who, ever since he came over the rail from the pier-head, had been intently listening to a new language.

"I'll take you, John," said the mate, and Stammerjohann, blushing, stepped over with the mate's men.

The second mate glowered at the other; then, shrugging his shoulders, said to the mate—

"You're welcome to it, sir."

The mate, half apologetically, bade one of his previously picked men to go over to the second mate's watch.

"All right," he said, and the jump, after staring at the backs of the mates as they went to the poop, followed the crew forward.

Night fell, black as a coal yard.

The mate's watch went to the forecastle, a frowsy little dwelling abaft the foremast, with bunks ranged along its sides and a dirty table in its center. A sailor lit the lamp which, hanging above the table, remained motionless while the ship rolled easily to a following wind.

The skinny jump immediately climbed into a bunk and was at once dragged out by Putman, who growled—

"You lay off a bit!"

He leered at Putman, who promptly knocked him down with a hard shove on the chest.

While he rose, expostulating, to his feet, the sailors, ignoring him, picked the bunks along the port side of the forecastle and, having tossed straw mattresses into them, threw off their dungaree jackets and pants and rolled in.

When they were turned in, Putman looked over the edge of his bunk to the two jumps.

"All right," he said, "douse that glim."

The skinny jump crawled into the farthest from the door of the two vacant lower bunks, leaving the bunk by the door to Stammerjohann. There was a remnant of mattress in the farther bunk, no mattress at all in the bunk by the door. Stammerjohann turned the lamp out and lay down in the bare bunk by the door, while the skinny jump, curling himself up as far as the narrow space would allow, tried to sleep.

Stammerjohann, dozing off, was awakened by the fellow's hand upon his shoulder. Shaking him, the jump said:

"Hey! Git out, you big square'ead!"

And Stammerjohann climbed out, unquestioning. With the gleam of a rising moon coming through the open door the skinny jump, dragging his remnant of mattress with him, changed bunks with Stammerjohann.

The sea was becoming noisy, and while Stammerjohann fell asleep, the other lay fidgeting and cursing in the bunk by the door.

When a sea rolled over the railing by the fore shrouds and surged across the deck level with the door-sill, he leaped with a frightened cry from his bunk. The sailor in the bunk above, disturbed by his outcry, said—

"What's up?"

The skinny jump was awakening Stammerjohann, and while the awakened sailor stared down at them in the faint moon glow, the two changed bunks again, Stammerjohann making no demur.

"Shut that —— door," said the sailor. "What the ——!"

Stammerjohann closed the door, shutting the moonshine out, and returned to the bunk by the door. He lay wakeful, listening to the night's noises and feeling the lift and pitch of the gently rolling ship. The other fell asleep and snored like a pig, so that the sailor in the bunk above, wakened again by his snoring, reached down and struck his face, saying—

"Quit that, you!"

The jump screamed and other sailors woke. Putman climbed from his bunk and lit the lamp; then, seeking in his sea chest, found a bottle, with a drop in the bottom. He tilted it up and, his head thrown back, gulped the last drop of liquor. The others said—

"Pass the bottle, 'Puttie'!" The bottle went from hand to hand, the sailors taking long sniffs at it and licking its opening fondly.

The skinny jump sat up in his bunk and, shivering, begged for a smell at the empty

bottle. They paid no attention to him. Putman flung the bottle out of a port-hole and over the ship's side, then turned the lamp out. The sailors slept again, the jump still awake and shivering in his bunk.

STAMMERJOHANN was breathing long and deep, a streak of moonshine through the open port striking upon his upturned face. The other awakened him.

"Ain't you got no bottle no place, square'ead?" he whined, and Stammerjohann, not understanding the fellow's words, said—

"Yah, meester."

The jump woke the sailor in the bunk above him.

"Square'ead's got a bottle," he said, and the sailor leaped from his bunk and lighted the lamp again.

The watch sat up in their bunks and bade Stammerjohann fetch out his bottle; then, understanding, cursed the jump. Putman dropped to the deck and knocked him down.

"Fer a dime I'd dance on ye!" he said. Then he got back into his bunk and, looking down, growled, "Douse that glim."

Cursing them under his breath, and most of all Stammerjohann, the jump rose to his feet. He seized Stammerjohann by the leg to drag him from his bunk, and Stammerjohann climbed out, to stand staring blandly at the skinny man who stood shaking his fists at him. When a sailor looked down at them, the jump crept back into his bunk, saying to Stammerjohann—

"Turn the lamp out, square'ead."

Stammerjohann turned the lamp out and sat at the table, his face white marble in the moonshine.

At midnight the second mate's watch came below, and the mate's men went to the deck for their four hours' duty. It was a blowy night, the ship driving south under topgallant sails.

They sent the skinny jump to the forecastle head to keep lookout. Putman was at the wheel. The others walked up and down, sober now and talking of the shore.

Stammerjohann stood by the rail and watched the moon-lit sea crests, the night filled with high murmurous noises, the ship's mastheads swinging easily beneath dark and silver-edged cloud masses.

By and by the mate blew his whistle, calling the watch to take a sail off her.

"Aloft and furl it!" said the mate when the sail was clewed up, and Stammerjohann followed a sailor into the rigging. His cap blew over the side, and the wind was cold in his hair. His face upturned to the man who climbed above him, he climbed on and swung out eagerly over the futtock shrouds as if his home were up there, somewhere in the winds above them.

When, reaching the flapping sail, they stood beside the mast to gather it up the sailor called to him—

"What wuz yer last ship, Dutchie?"

He shouted back—"Yah, meester." And the sailor laughed, shouting—

"Ho, ho!" then muttering, "Big square-'ead!" cried, "Roll her up, son!"

Stammerjohann imitated the man's actions and, reaching down, his big hands clawing at the sail, dragged fistfuls of canvas under his chest.

"Strong like a ol' bull," said the sailor, and shouted, "Pass them gaskets!"

He showed Stammerjohann how to pass a gasket, then, because Stammerjohann was so apt, cried—

"What wuz yer last ship, Dutchie?"

"Yah, yah, meester," shouted Stammerjohann, whereat the sailor stood erect on the foot-rope and struck his hand upon the rolled-up sail, laughing "Ho, ho!" again.

They went down together, the sailor first; the ship a slender silver-lit wedge far beneath, her sails night-bird wings.

The bell struck four bells, two o'clock of an ocean morning, and wheel and lookout were relieved, Stammerjohann going to the lookout, where spray, slatting over the plunging bows, spattered all about him.

The jump, sea-soaked, shuddered and went to hide in his bunk, till a sailor finding him there dragged him out. Thereafter he crouched under the lee of the deck-house for the remainder of his two hours on duty, alarmed at the sea, at uplifted heads of dark rollers that frowned on him from a few feet away.

Stammerjohann stood like a tranced man, his face to the seas ahead where the moon rode low. Grown chill, he beat his arms, and a sailor seeing him went to rummage under the forecastle-head, and ascended to him presently, carrying an old piece of sail.

"'Ere, big Dutch," said the sailor. "'T'll keep a drop o' the sea off of ye."

Stammerjohann beamed down on the man.

"Yah, meester," he said, and wrapped the old canvas round his shoulders.

He stood facing the ocean—an archangel with the cloud-filtered moon rays bright in his hair.

"Tha's a queer square'ead, ain't it?" said one sailor to another.

They laughed at the shadowy sight of the big man up there alone, the chill of just before dawn's birth about him.

When they went below at four o'clock the skinny jump crept voiceless into his bunk, awed by the dawn cold. Stammerjohann slumbered at his feet. Day opened while the mate's men slept, the second mate's watch setting sail again in a falling wind.

When, at the striking of eight bells once more, the second day began, sailors went about their work as if they had been months at sea; talking of the shore now and then as men speak of things that have existed long ago. Older men jested, tentatively, with the mate, who jested back unsmiling. They scoured away the grime of harbor. The ship appeared freer, cleaner; now become fully alive like a bird given freedom and far flown from cage bars. The forecastle, frowsy no longer, was airy and bright.

The jump shivered till the mate, observant of trifles now that the ship was well offshore, called him. He took him and Stammerjohann, also, aft to the skipper.

The skipper signed them on at ordinary seamen's wages—thirty-five shillings—a matter of eight and a half dollars—a month. They wrote their names laboriously; the skinny jump with little twisted illegible letters; Stammerjohann in a great scrawling hand that covered inches. So that the skipper looked up to the mate, who, meeting his eyes, almost smiled.

"Got any oilskins?" asked the skipper.

"Yah, meester," said Stammerjohann and, with a wave of the hand, the skipper dismissed him to return forward. "You, oilskins?" he asked the other.

"I hain't got nuthink, Mister," said the jump, and the skipper went below to the slop chest and fetched him a suit—stiff, hard and shiny. A drizzle was falling, and the jump got into them and into leather sea-boots. Then, warming with the wind held from his skin, went muttering to hide from sight till the mate, finding him, bade him get deck bucket and swab and wipe off the ship's paint work. Stammerjohann also had a bucket and swab. He was wet through. The skipper saw him and called the mate.

"Have that fellow put his oilskins on," he said, and the mate, calling Stammerjohann, bade him get into his oilskins.

"Yah, meester, yah," said Stammerjohann, staring down into the mate's face.

" 'Ee h'ain't got no oilskins, sir," said a sailor, and the mate took him aft again to the skipper, who, shrugging his shoulders, fetched him a suit.

Stammerjohann carried the oilskins forward and laid them in his bunk, folding them neatly, then returned to his work.

" 'Ee is like a codfish," said a sailor. " 'Ee don't know it's cold."

"I bets 'ee isn't never been kissed by no gal," said another, and they laughed.

The mate, seeing him, ordered him to get into his oilskins and sea-boots, which, with slow understanding of the mate's gestures and words, he did. He returned to his work, hot, with sweat on his face, unused to the stiff raiment.

IN DAYS soon afterward the sun shone on blue seas, tinged in the hollows with shadows that were darkling. The skinny jump, forced to labor, and fed on plain fare, grew wider chested. His eyes became brighter. He attained the vindictive appearance of a ferret, rather than that of a hungry rat. When sent aloft, he shook and trembled and clung to the jackstays, continually in the way of every one upon the swaying footropes.

Stammerjohann began to pick up a few words of English. Entrusted with the helm, he steered faultlessly, learning the points of the compass astonishingly soon.

When, one dog-watch, a sailor brought a concertina to the deck, the crew paired off and danced together, sober-faced as a company of judges. Stammerjohann, his hands on his hips, danced alone, whirling round most sober of them all, and dreamy-eyed. When the concertina ceased all sat on the hatch.

The skinny jump stared down at them from lookout. The mate watched them from the break of the poop.

The sun sank in the sea, and a vermilion

pathway blazoning from the westward encarnadined the headsails. The ship appeared like an enormous swan, crimson beaked, swimming contentedly toward the drowsy roosts of night.

Stammerjohann lifted the concertina and—the sailors watching him—fondled it with gentle fingers.

When—his eyes on the rim of the sea where the sun was sunken, the glow of sky and ocean on his face—he began to play, the men all gathered close about.

"Play a dance, Yonny," said a sailor, and he swung to a dance tune, whereat the sailors, pairing off, whirled round the foredeck.

The player rose and approached the odd man. He lifted his arms high and, fetching them around the odd man's shoulders, still played for the dancers. Beaming to his partner, he danced as he played.

The odd man called—

"Eh, boys, look at me and Yonny dance!"

When the rest were seated on the hatch again, the concertina player and the odd man danced on, while all the sailors laughed, clapping their hands.

Skipper and mate looked on from the poop railing. The skinny jump watched from lookout, the red of the dead daylight on his back, and his face shadowed.

The bell struck. Another night began. Some slept, some walked the starry decks.

As days passed on, the jump learned nothing. He cheated and lied and begged scraps of cabin food from the Malay sea cook, who regarded him with interest. The mate gave him the dirty work, the odd jobs. Stammerjohann worked aloft, helping one or another of the sailors. He still said, "Yah, meester," but used also, brokenly, a few words of the sailor's tongue. When they called him squarehead, he beamed on them. Often when they danced, he played for them. The jump never danced or sang. At such times he sat on the galley door-sill, waiting for scraps from the cook.

Beyond the tropics days grew chill and short. Devoid of sufficient coverings, the jump slept covered in oilskins. Till now he had passed unnoticed by the sailors. Now, because they no longer sat on the hatch in the dog-watch or slept under the open stars by night, they noticed him. He was unwashed.

They dragged him to the deck one evening and scoured him there, naked and shivering beneath the starry sky, while Stammerjohann was at the wheel.

Thereafter he washed. But he kept to himself the more, doing his work, the dirty and the odd jobs, silently, and often muttering vengeance on the ship and her crew.

Winds wailed from southerly, tossing the ship high, dizzy-masted under close clouds. By and by gales screamed. Days were brief, nights long and tempestuous. The sailors spent hours aloft, battling with canvas upon which snow was frozen. Their fingers bled, at nail and knuckle. Often one or other of them would glance up to Stammerjohann, toiling among them, and nod approvingly. Both mates and master now ignoring his peculiarities, he wore no oilskins. Cold seemed to mean naught to him. The skinny jump appropriated his oilskins for extra bunk covering.

Sometimes Stammerjohann fetched out the concertina and played it, the hands all seated round him with their eyes atwinkle. He ignored cracked skin on his fingers and knuckles. When he shouted broken words of English to men near him aloft, it was as if he and the wind were cousins.

In a gloomy dog-watch the skipper sent for Stammerjohann and signed him on again; now no longer an ordinary, but an able seaman at full pay, a matter of three pounds—more than twelve dollars—a month. Stammerjohann, understanding after much explanation, beamed, saying—

"Danks you, meester!"

When he left the chart-room, the skipper looked at the mate, who almost smiled.

They sent for the jump and reduced his pay to a pound, five dollars a month. He leered up at them, silent and savage, and returned forward, cursing ship, skipper, mates, sailors and sea.

Life-lines, boused down to ring-bolts of the deck planks, were stretched fore and aft. Men fought their way along them, heads tucked down, feet sliding on slippery decks, with old rags crammed between collars and necks to help keep the sea out.

The weather grew increasingly bitter, and Stammerjohann put his oilskins on. The jump swore at him, calling him foul names because robbed of his bunk coverings.

"Square'ead gets everythink," he whined. "I ain't got nuthink."

"You're right, you ain't," growled Putman, while others sat at the forecastle table, their heads close together, and played checkers; some roaring with laughter, some swearing when an extra heavy roll of the ship spilled the checker men from their places.

A barbaric night came when no human voice could be heard.

The skipper stood braced on his poop while, a tempest raging astern, the ship ran, rolling her port and starboard bulwarks under in quick succession; the hard clack of her parrals, the groan of her gear, lost in the uproar of weather and sea.

Stammerjohann took the helm at eight bells, eight o'clock.

At four bells, two hours later, Putman left the forecastle and, banging the iron door behind him, bowed into the blackness, battled along the deck, his strong clutch upon the wire-tight life-lines, on his way aft to relieve the wheel.

AT SIX bells, an hour afterward, the skipper stood by the wheel and, suddenly aware of an unrelieved helmsman, sought the mate, who clung to the poop's forward railing.

He shouted into the mate's ear, a hand on his arm. Because no speech could be heard mate, and master went together, holding to each other as they went, to the chart-room.

In the chart-room, his lips to the mate's ear, the skipper shouted—

"Where's the wheel relief?"

The mate stepped to the poop and hastened to the wheel where, unable to discern the helmsman in a sudden snow gust, he laid a hand upon the man, seeking to discover who steered.

"Yah, meester!" shouted Stammerjohann.

The mate returned to the chart-room and, looking in, signified by a wave of his hand that he was on his way forward to see about the wheel relief.

Twenty minutes after he descended from the poop to the main deck he came to the forecastle. Water raged in as he opened the door, deep above the door-sill. As the sailors looked inquiry to him he shouted—

"Where's Putman?"

The jump lay curled, deathly white, in his bunk.

"Where's Putman?" shouted the mate again, bending to a sailor's ear.

The sailor, a hand to his lips, rose and shouted a reply.

The mate shook his head.

They stared from one to another.

The helmsman whose turn followed Putman's rose and moved toward the door, but the mate grasped his arm, and they stood peering into one another's eyes, the sailor nodding vigorously, the mate shaking his head.

The mate bellowed to the sailor:

"Stay here. Keep off the deck!"

And the man, gesturing with a hand, framed unheard words.

The mate opened the door, two sailors standing by to close it when he was gone. When the door banged to behind him chaos enclosed the mate, who, clutching the life-line, crept, now on his feet, now on his knees, toward the poop. At times he made no progress, but bided—deaf, dumb, sightless—while, his feet swept from under him, the sea ravaged from railing to railing.

The sailor whose turn at the wheel followed Putman's stood by the forecastle door a moment when the mate was gone; then, darting to the table, seized and bent over it, his lips at another man's ear.

"Puttie's gone!" he shouted.

The man turned to the man beside him.

"Puttie's gone!" he shouted.

The word went round from man to man.

The second mate's men, sleep impossible for the wild roll of the racing ship, lay looking from their bunks to the men of the mate's watch.

Boyle beckoned one of the mate's men, who, coming to his bunk side, shouted—

"Puttie's gone!"

The mate's men went from bunk to bunk, telling the starboard watch that Puttie was gone.

Fifty minutes after the mate had left the poop he returned to it. The skipper not in the chart-room, he found him by the wheel, and took his arm. They went together to the chart-room.

Arrived there, the mate, his face close to the skipper's, pointed to the invisible sea.

The skipper, a hand to the mate's shoulder, shouted into his ear—

"Don't let any one on deck!"

Then he returned to stand by the wheel.

The mate descended to the main deck again. By and by the watches in the

forecastle saw their door opening and caught a glimpse of an oilskinned arm. They dragged the mate in, banging the door after him. Their quarters were knee-deep in water.

The mate stood surrounded by both watches. He was bare-headed. One of his sea-boots was gone. A hand to his lips, he clung to the table edge and shouted to the sailors, whose expectant faces fell.

"Keep off the deck!" he said.

A sailor of his watch took him by the arm and, pointing to himself, bellowed, "Me!" nodding his head aft toward the wheel as he did so.

The sailor's eyes watching his lips, the mate shook his head, repeating, unheard—

"Keep off the deck!"

Boyle took off his southwester and shoved it into the mate's hand, and the mate, expostulating, put it on and tied it beneath his chin. When another of his men fetched a pair of sea-boots the mate shook his head, waving the men away. But, surrounding him, they forced him to a seat on a sea chest. One brought a dry sock, and the mate looking resignedly up at them, drew it upon his naked foot. Boyle thumped the man nearest him upon the back, and they looked from one to another, and at their mate.

Edging one another away, each seeking to come close to the mate; each, while the kneeling sailor strove to pull the sea-boot upon the mate's socked foot, pointed to his own breast, shouting, "Me, sir!" and nodding aft toward the wheel.

At the vigorous shaking of the mate's head their hopeful faces fell.

The sea-boot too small, the sailor hurled it into a corner, where it sank in a swirl of gurling water, and the mate, rising to his feet, shouted again—

"Keep off the deck!"

Despite their protestations he made toward the door, and in a moment was gone.

In the forecastle oaths commingled with the roar of the tempest.

The jump sat up in his bunk and, taking no notice of the sailors, brought a cabin biscuit, stolen from the Malay sea cook, from beneath his mattress and began to munch it.

Boyle strode toward him and, snatching the biscuit from his fingers, hurled it to the water that washed to and fro.

He sat cursing them, unheard, in a shrill whine, while the biscuit floated in knee-deep water, with the checker board and checkers.

The sailors gathered up the checkers and saved the checker-board. The sodden biscuit sank.

A sailor, his hands fumbling under his straw mattress, brought out the concertina and stood braced, his back against the bunks, the instrument in his hands. But Boyle approached him, their eyes met and the man with the concertina put it away again under the mattress.

"Poor old Puttie!" shouted Boyle.

The mate having reached the poop, found the skipper by the wheel, and bawled, "All right, sir," into his ear, then passed down the chart-room companionway to his room. He took an old shirt from a drawer and, having ripped it into strips, bound it about his foot and ankle above a dry sock.

Till day broke the skipper and mate stood by Stammerjohann, Stammerjohann twirling the wheel. When now and again the binnacle light illumined his down-bent face, his eyes resembled blue moons—wide, cold, brilliant. Salt clung in the thick stubble of his unshaven face.

AT DAWN the wind fell.

A sailor of the mate's watch made his way aft to the wheel and, taking the spokes over, looked up into the helmsman's salt-crusted face.

"Nord," said Stammerjohann, looking expressionlessly down to the other, who repeated, "North."

Stammerjohann stopped at the chart-room door to give the course, "Nord," to the mate, who said:

"North. All right."

Stammerjohann rejoined his shipmates in the forecastle and, made way for by all, sat at the table where, presently, his head fallen on his breast, he slept; his body braced by the bodies of his fellows, who sat close against him, their legs braced to the deck.

At seven bells, twenty after seven of the morning, they hauled the jump from his bunk.

"Get the whack!" they shouted at him and, cursing the ship and her crew, he crept toward the galley to fetch the breakfast for the men of the second mate's watch. In pauses of inrolling waters he made uneasy

rushes along the life-line and, entering the galley presently, shouted to the Malay. Blaspheming at the wind, he asked for cabin scraps. When the ship took a long deep roll he grasped the Malay to steady himself, and so prevented the sea cook from reaching to steady the cabin breakfast which stood on the stove, all ready for the steward when he should come for it.

The cabin breakfast slid and, falling, spilled upon the galley deck and, while the Malay swore volubly in his own tongue, the jump commenced to gather up scraps of the spilled food. Smacking his thin lips, he crammed bacon into his mouth.

"Gimme a cabin biscuit, cookie," he shouted.

The Malay, picking up a long knife, drove him to the deck. He looked back into the galley to curse the sea cook, who, thrusting the men's mess-kit into his hands, swore at him again.

Still chewing bacon, he made his way forward, water swirling now to his knees, now to his waist. Holding to the life-line with one hand, he held the mess-kit high in the other.

When the ship pitched deep, smothering her forecastle head and then flinging her bows high, he yelled with terror on her swamped foredeck and, gripping the life-line with both hands, let the mess-kit fall. It was instantly swept overboard, where gulls swooped down to it, their screams inaudible in the falling wind.

The jump came to the forecastle empty handed.

"Where's the whack?" they shouted.

Boyle went to the galley, where the cook told him—in pidgin mixed with many curses—that the other had taken the food forward.

The men ate hardtack from the forecastle bread-barge for breakfast, then went aft in a body.

The skipper, seeing his crew coming aft along the yet sea-swept decks, went to the break of the poop and half way down the accommodation ladder to meet them, wondering what might be the matter.

Boyle told him.

When the sailors were gone forward the skipper said to the mate:

"See that that fellow lives under the forecastle head. Put him in the spare locker room. The men won't have him in the forecastle."

As the mate went forward the skipper called after him—

"We'll set that reefed foresail, Mister, at eight bells."

As he spoke eight bells was struck by the helmsman and, answering the mate's order, all hands came to the deck.

The wind lulled suddenly, and the skipper called the mate aft again.

"The blow's over, Mister," he said. "We'll set the foresail full, and mainsail and main topgallant."

Immense rollers swung idly by the ship. She rolled uneasily, without sufficient sail set to steady her now that the wind was fallen. Her parrals clacked. Her gear complained.

The skipper went to the chart-room to look at the barometer.

The mate said to the jump—

"Hop up there, you, and give them a hand to shake the reef out and loose that foresail."

While the watches stood ready to let go the clew and bunt-lines, the jump climbed into the rigging.

"Get out on that lee yard-arm!" the mate called after him.

"I wish he'd fall and break his neck, sir," said the second mate.

While mates and men waited, the jump crawled out to leeward on the fore foot-rope.

"We's ready for a bite to eat, ain't we, ol' Square'ead?" said one of the mate's men to Stammerjohann who, statue-like, stood at the railing, close to the fore sheet bollards, and watched the tumbling seas.

There was a splash in the sea close by the forward railing, while a cry rang down from a sailor on the foreyard.

"By cripes!" cried the second mate, and the mate gave a sharp order.

At the mate's order the second mate exclaimed, "For ——'s sake, sir!" and the mate, hearing the words, as he had heard the second's previous words, shrugged his shoulders.

There was another splash in the dark water alongside the fore railing.

The second mate shouted, "Quick, for ——'s sake, boys!" while sailors ran, some to the weather main braces and some to clear away the lifeboat falls.

A black head, passing astern, bobbed in the sea, and clawing fingers waved frantically.

A southwestered head moved steadily toward the black head—the oilskinned

form of Stammerjohann ploughing through black waters toward the shrieking jump.

Some one flung a lifebuoy from the ship's poop.

Boyle, at the wheel, looked back, the skipper at his side. Not a dozen feet from the buoy the jump's head vanished, then reappeared. A hand grasped the buoy, another the jump's hair, and buoy and black head swung together.

A pair of clutching hands seized the southwestered head of Stammerjohann, and Stammerjohann and the jump vanished together, the buoy bobbing alone upon the sea.

The skipper, at the helmsman's side, muttered an oath.

Boyle yelled to the passing boat—

"Pull—pull—pull!"

The mate stood erect in the boat's stern sheets.

A bare yellow head appeared and big hands dragged a limp form to the buoy. The jump clung to the buoy, shrieking.

"Look at 'im, sorr!" cried Boyle to the skipper beside him.

Drifted a dozen feet from the buoy, Stammerjohann was taking his oilskins off.

"May I 'it 'im on the 'ead wiv' my oar, sir?" asked the stroke oarsman of the mate, while, grabbing Stammerjohann, the bow oar said—

"'Ere you are, big Dutch, for a —— fool!"

While Stammerjohann clambered over the bow of the lifeboat, the bow oarsman reached for the oilskin coat, which was sinking, and gathered in the southwester, afloat upside down.

The mate looked round to the ship, two hundred feet away.

The skipper waved a hand to him.

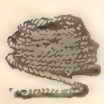
"For ——'s love, no, sorr!" muttered Boyle.

The mate said, "Give way," and the boat crept toward the jump.

The bow oarsman took him by the hair with both hands and, a foot braced against the gunwale, growled—

"Bawl, you ——!"

He hove him inboard, and he lay spluttering and moaning in the boat's bottom.



THE lifeboat returned to the ship.

When she was on her chocks again the skipper spoke down to the mate.

"Send all hands to the cabin door, Mister."

The men gathered at the cabin door, Stammerjohann in their midst and the jump behind them.

The skipper came to the cabin door and, pouring a tot of grog, handed it to the nearest sailor. The sailor swung on his heel.

"'Ere you are, big Dutchie," he said.

"Danks you, meester," said Stammerjohann.

The skipper poured another tot and another till all but the jump had had one; then turned away.

The men went forward, hurrying, some to loose sail, some to man the main braces.

"Hey, Mister!" cried the jump as the skipper banged the cabin door in his face.

He stood there a moment, cursing the skipper and ship.

"Lay hold o' those braces!" said the second mate, and he went muttering to the braces.

He shivered and shirked while they gave her her courses and topgallants.

At four bells, ten o'clock, the mate's men went at last below, one of them stopping at the galley for their breakfast.

They ate ravenously, the jump eyeing them vindictively because the coffee pot was passed by him till all were served. They climbed into their bunks and fell at once asleep.

Stammerjohann and the jump took off their wet clothing, the jump vowing to Stammerjohann that he would some day get even with them all and with the ship and mates and skipper.

The mate looked in.

"You," he said to the jump, "get your dunnage out of there!"

"Wot is it, Mister?" asked the jump.

"Get your dunnage!" said the mate.

He took the jump forward under the forecastle head and shoved him, carrying his rags and mattress into a spare locker room.

"You keep out of the forecastle. They'll kill you," said the mate, and went aft.

The jump flung his rags into the bunk and, covering himself with an old piece of sail-cloth, curled up and went to sleep.

At noon, when the mate's men fetched their dinner, the sun was high and the sea bright. Clotheslines were stretched from stay to stay, strung with wet clothing The sailors ate and talked about old Puttie.

When they came to the deck, relieving the second mate's watch, the jump, awakening, returned to the forecastle door and demanded food.

Boyle rose and took out his sheath knife.

"Cut out his liver!" said a sailor, and as Boyle stepped toward him, the jump fled.

He went to the galley to demand food of the cook, who was gone aft to the cabin to see the steward. Helping himself to the cook's dinner, he stood at the hot fire to eat it, and was gone ere the cook returned.

He saw the mate, looking for him under the forecastle head, and busied himself coiling the ropes up till the mate, seeing him, sent him to clean the pig pen on the top of the midship house. The sailors were busied aloft, repairing damage of the gale.

Boyle, taking the emptied mess-kit back to the galley, saw him inside the pig pen with the black pig and bolted the door on him.

While the mate's watch worked aloft and the second mate's slept, he stayed there, ignored by the mate when he passed by. The pig grunted at him, while he vowed unnamable revenges. They left him there through the afternoon and on into the dog-watch, till Stammerjohann, seeing him, unbolted the door. He came out on hands and knees, dirty with filth of the pig pen and, looking up at Stammerjohann, whined:

"You wait! I'll fix you all. —— you!"

The sailors gathered round him. They made him strip his clothing off and scour both his clothes and his body as the sun went down. He scrubbed himself lest they scrub him as they had done once before, and afterward, having missed his supper, stole hardtack from the forecastle bread-barge, and sat in the forecastle to eat until the mate looked in and saw him there.

"I told you to keep out of there," said the mate.

He went and sat in his locker room, while all hands stood about the hatch, listening to Stammerjohann playing the concertina.

At four bells, six o'clock, he went to the lookout, and there walked up and down, savagely brooding. After dark had fallen he moved forward and, leaning in the bow, stared at the sea ahead. The ship sailed easily, a fine wind aft, the water murmuring about her and glimmers of a rising moon on her high canvas. He watched the heaving sea with dark cloud-shadowed patches gliding across its gleaming expanse. He stood there a long time, motionless, the strains of the concertina faintly reaching him, commingled with the upwash of the waters.

Leaning suddenly far forward he almost cried out; but checking himself, peered from ferret eyes into a shadowed sea patch near the ship ahead.

A shadow, darker than cloud shadows, loomed low on the water, the ship sailing steadily toward it.

He straightened and, turning about, shaking a fist at the ship, embraced her, and all to do with her in a gesture of derision. Then, suddenly appalled, sped aft and, leaping down the accommodation ladder, ran along the main deck.

The sailors saw him running toward them.

Save for the concertina, upon the face of whose player the breaking moon shone bright, there was a momentary silence; the sea's sounds hushed and naught but the low vibrations of the wind amidst the rigging audible.

The mate, on his way forward, paused by the hatch and, at the moment that the sailors were aware of the approaching jump, stumbled and fell, crying aloud—

"My ——!"

The sailors stumbled, to steady instantly, keyed to the notes of the mate's sharp order.

The fallen jump rose to his feet, an unseen sneer in his eyes.

A voice called loud—

"A derelict!"

The moon went out.

Fore and main topgallantmasts crashed down, torn sails and twisted backstays rending and tearing. The whole ship trembled. Braces and sheets gave way to leeward where a dark hulk fouled them. Uproar filled the night.

THROUGHOUT the night both watches labored.

A sail, wrapped about the ship's crushed bows, eased the strain on her collision bulkhead, forty feet aft from the stem. While some cleared wreckage aloft, others pumped, the jump pumping with them until Boyle spoke to the mate. Then the mate went to speak to the skipper.

"Put him in irons, Mister," said the skipper.

The wind died. A full moon gleamed on the ship, lying with her bow deep. She lay deeper and ever deeper. They pumped on and on till day came back and a yellow sun rose from a sharp rimmed sea, the skipper watching the horizons for a sail that did not appear. The concertina lay on the

hatch, beneath sails that drooped lifeless.

Toward noon they provisioned and cleared away the boats, some pumping while the others did so. They swung the lifeboats out over the water.

With no one at her wheel the ship veered, now pointing north, now south. The unfed pig squealed for food.

All hands pumped on into the evening; the bells unstruck. As the sun went down, their eyes dulled, their bodies became listless, though still pumping—machines now rather than men. Steward and cook and both mates helped man the clanking pumps. Water, gushing from below, flowed toward the scuppers while, as they pumped, they ate.

When dark fell Boyle said:

"She's sinkin', boys. Pump!"

A minute afterward some one laughed loud. Then long silence was broken by the squealing of the pig.

They pumped throughout another night.

At wane of moon and rise of sun they left her, the mates directing them as though such things came daily.

Voiceless and exhausted, they pulled away and lay to upon their oars beyond the shadow flung by her broken mastheads on the unrippled sea. Light filling all the sky rimmed the ocean clearly.

Huddled one on another, they fell asleep.

Stammerjohann sat, the concertina on his knees, his back to the gunwale of the mate's boat.

Presently the mate woke them, starting up, asking—

"Where's that fellow?"

While those in the master's boat slept on the mate's boat drew in beneath the ship's side again. The mate, accompanied by Stammerjohann, boarded her and went forward.

"Get out!" said the mate, and the jump walked between them to the rail amidships where the boat lay.

While the ship trembled as from torture within, the mate grasped him and hove him over the railing and, missing the boat, now drifted a few feet from her side, he fell into the sea.

Boyle laughed, while the boat's crew stared nonchalantly at a drowning man.

The mate sprang into the boat, followed by Stammerjohann, who, reaching a long arm over the water as the jump sank, hauled him into the lifeboat.

They pulled away once more and, beyond the thin lines of her shadows, rested on their oars to watch her founder.

The jump, his hands ironed, asked for food.

The squeal of the pig sounded over the water.

"Yer chum's 'ungry," said a sailor, at which all but the mate and Stammerjohann laughed.

The jump gazed at the mate, who flung him a biscuit. It fell and lay between Stammerjohann's feet. Unable to pick it up, he gazed at Stammerjohann imploringly.

Stammerjohann gazed back at him.

The skipper stood erect in the other lifeboat and, hat in hand, watched while his ship sank lower. Of a sudden she canted to port, then back to starboard, then steadied, as if, left to herself, no longer able to depend upon her servitors, she were become fully possessed of her individuality—suffering, but brave.

Save for the ripple caused by her struggle, there was no ripple on the water.

When Stammerjohann rose to his feet to watch her, a sailor whispered to the man beside him—

"Look at Dutchie's eyes!"

The boat's crew looked up at Stammerjohann.

Like a mare mired in boggy earth, the ship endeavored to lift her forefoot from the engulfing ocean and, having risen a few inches, remained a moment motionless. Then, as if pulled from below, dropped in the water and sank like a stone.

Ripples circled outward toward the two lifeboats.

When her jagged mastheads vanished, the skipper sat down.

Stammerjohann alone remained standing, and stared at the spot where she had been.

The jump munched the biscuit which a sailor had thrust into his ironed hands. There was no sound but the sound of his munching.

While the sailors stretched themselves out and fell asleep, Stammerjohann looked down at him.

Closing his eyes, the mate lay back in the stern sheets.

There was no movement in the skipper's boat, above whose gunwale drooping heads and shoulders were visible, the heads of skipper and second mate among them.

Looking up to Stammerjohann, the jump asked for more food.

His eyes met Stammerjohann's eyes, his mouth fell open.

He appeared like a rat that, desirous of thievery, has of a sudden come face to face with inescapable doom.

Bending, Stammerjohann laid a big hand upon his lips, and with the other grasped his throat. With the jump striking out with his feet and raising his ironed hands in protest, he lifted and swung him clear of the boat's gunwale.

Turning, Stammerjohann looked to the other lifeboat; then, scanning the sharp-cut horizons, hesitated at sight of a white speck on the rim of the south.

A low gurgle escaped the lips of the jump who, his struggles ineffectual, hung limp in Stammerjohann's grasp.

For the space of a few seconds Stammerjohann held him, outswung above the water; then, with a hard downward push, released him and sat down on the boat thwart, his eyes on the far distant ship.

PRESENTLY his head nodded and he, also, slept.

Toward noon, roused by a cry from the skipper's boat, the mate awakened and, calling to his sailors, pointed to a ship creeping over the now gently rippled sea. Pushing their oars out, the men lay back upon them.

Stammerjohann slept soundly.

"Leave him sleep," said the mate.

The clank of the oars in the rowlocks failed to disturb him.

When the rowers ceased their pulling, he started up, wakened by the sudden silence. The lifeboats swept in under awaiting davit tackles of a hove to ship.

The crews of both boats clambered aboard and mingled with inquiring sailors on the vessel's deck; two men staying in each boat to hook on the tackle blocks.

Boyle looked down from the ship's railing to the mate and Stammerjohann who bent above the blocks at the boat's bow and stern. He called a question to Stammerjohann.

No answer came to his question.

The mate glanced around to Stammerjohann and, observing his bent face, smiled.

"All fast," said the mate, looking up to the railing. "Hoist away."

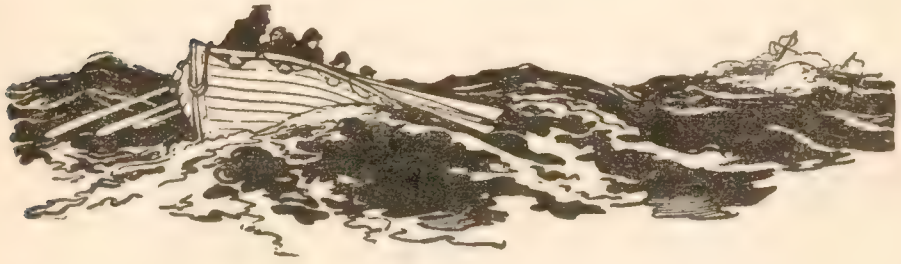
With Stammerjohann he climbed to the railing and leaped to the vessel's deck.

The crew of the sunken ship were gathered beneath her mizzen shrouds.

"All here?" asked the skipper of the sunken ship of his sailors.

"All hands but ol' Puttie, sir," answered Boyle.

"All here, sir," the mate said.



Carvahal

A Complete Novelette

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Rodomont," "The White-Tailed Dragon," etc.

HE WAS an impudent mite of humanity. French, Swahili and Malagasy flowed on his tongue with equal facility, and he was no respecter of persons. He was an expert thief; he had knifed more than one brown rascal; he had been in jail; his antecedents were unknown. He lived by theft, fish-line and native hospitality, and the missionaries had long ago given him up. He might have been twelve years of age, might have been more. Hard to say.

This boy, Carvahal by name, lived in Moroni, chief town of the island of Grand Comore.

Murray had anchored his schooner off Moroni during the afternoon. About midnight, he caught the boy rummaging the after cabin, fairly surprized him in the act. Murray was no man to be easily pillaged. The electric torch picked up the lithe, slim, nearly naked young figure, brought out the pert, intelligent, impish face, startled but not terrified, and came to rest upon the knife-hand. Murray cocked his big revolver and spoke in French.

"Throw down that knife. How did you get aboard?"

The boy obeyed. Murray struck a match and lighted a candle glued to the table with its own wax; then he sat down and produced a cigaret. The boy could not get past to the companionway, and the cabin port was fast locked.

"I swam aboard," said the boy gravely, without evasion. "Your watch is drunk or asleep."

"Oh! And what were you trying to steal?"

"What you have."

Murray chuckled. He liked these answers, liked something in the air of the young rascal. No whining, no abject lies or cringing, but a level-eyed stare as challenging as his own.

"What'll you say when I turn you over to the harbor police, eh?"

"But you won't," said the boy, and a glitter of laughter leaped into his eyes.

"Oh, won't I!" said Murray grimly, and half-meant his words. "You're a thief."

"Why not? I steal to live." And the boy shrugged. "What else is for me in this place?"

"Hm! Truth in that. Your name?"

"Carvahal."

"Portuguese? Who are your people?"

"Who knows? Ask at the gendarmerie. They have heard of me."

"Doubtless." Murray chuckled. "Well, ashore you go in irons, my boy."

"No," said the boy flatly, staring at him. "You won't dare."

"What d'ye mean by that?" snapped

Murray. "Won't dare, indeed! And why not?"

"I'll tell them what I was trying to find."

"Eh?" Murray started slightly. "What, then?"

"The Soronho diamonds."

A dead silence fell upon the cabin, broken only by Murray's quick, harsh breathing and the *plat-lap* of waves alongside. Murray stared, absolutely dumbfounded by those three words, his fingers tightening ominously on the revolver butt, his brows down-drawn, eyes narrow with alarmed suspicion. Carvahal stood smiling a little. Avowed antagonist, this boy!

How in the ——'s name could the boy know? None of the crew had been allowed ashore, and they had not talked. Murray had come direct across the Mozambique channel from Lourenço Marques to this lonely island set between Madagascar and Africa, this French-ruled isle of Grand Comore, having neither cable nor radio and only one steamer each month to the outer world. How had word flown here ahead of him? Even his own crew did not know very much!

Soronho was dead, scuppered by that Portuguese gang of official thieves before the British could extradite him for illicit diamond buying. And the stones had vanished, dropping out of sight as stars on a cloudy night. Soronho took his chances and lost the gamble. The two minor officials, agents of the gang higher up who sought the vanished stones, also took their chances and lost the gamble. Murray had won, by aid of a faithful native servant who loved Soronho. Only he and that native, now well paid and gone home, knew what had become of the Soronho diamonds until this thieving boy blurted out the words to his face!

"So you have them, then!" said the boy a trifle disdainfully.

Murray scorned to lie to him after what had already passed between them.

"Yes. How did you know anything about it?"

Carvahal took a cigaret from behind his ear, came forward with lithe step, dropped into a chair across the table from Murray and leaned over to light his cigaret at the candle. He had suddenly become cool, impudently sure of himself as any man thrice his age. He leaned back, exhaled a thin cloud of smoke at Murray and nodded.

"Now, *mon vieux*, we shall bargain," he said.

Murray watched him with a species of admiration glimmering in those cold, stern eyes of his. Few men would have stood up to Hamilton Murray as did this naked boy; few men would have lived so long to do it. Murray divined, indeed, that behind the boy's manner was a certain desperation, and waited to see what came next. He was, none the less, in no little extremity himself. He had the stones, and they were fair loot, for which there might or might not be government pursuit, even were his connection known. The Portuguese might guess it, but how the—

"Two days ago," said the boy slowly, "the steamer stopped here on her way back from Zanzibar and left newspapers. I read one. It told about the loss of the Soronho diamonds at Lourenço Marques. You have just come from there. So I suspected something."

Murray nodded.

"Good groundwork," he commented. "But my name wasn't in the papers."

The boy's eyes dwelt upon his face, alertly, watchfully, appraisingly, and Murray felt himself already beaten.

"There is a wireless station at Anjouan, the island to the south," continued Carvahal, picking his words. "I have nothing else to do. I watch the flashes that relay the news and orders here from Anjouan."

Murray tightened in his chair. Flashes! He had forgotten that. These islands were in communication, then!

"Go on," he said tensely, sudden sweat on his brow.

Carvahal grinned at him.

"I don't go on. Now is the time to bargain, monsieur."

"You imp of Satan!" snapped Murray. "What do you want? Money?"

"Don't we all want money?" came the cool response. "But I want more than that. I want to get away from this accursed island and reach the world. I have no papers, my *dossier* is against me, I have not a sou. Tonight, as I lay watching the flashes, I picked up a message about you. It gave me a club to use. *Moi voici*, I am here!" Carvahal tossed the butt of his cigaret on the table and hooked his thumbs in his ragged shirt as he leaned back. "I know you're not an ordinary trader. I saw you ashore this afternoon. You're not a drunkard, you

don't have your eye on the women and your crew don't talk Swahili, but pure Arab. At a guess, I'd say you'd been running guns from Aden or Muscat into Somaliland and had to come down to these waters to lie low for a while."

Murray was more than amazed; he was simply stricken dumb with astounded wonder.

"Are you a boy or—or a devil?" he murmured.

Carvahal chuckled impishly.

"Both, according to the priests. At least, thank the good God, I am not a fool! Here is my chance and I grasp it."

Murray took another cigaret, and put his case on the table. The boy seized it and extracted one with obvious approval.

"Ah, English! They come in round tins. They are good."

"Name your terms," said Murray curtly. "You want passage where?"

"Anywhere, away from French territory, but I also want the use of your schooner for three weeks."

"Eh?" Murray blinked a little. "What?"

"Three weeks, perhaps less," came the unblushing response.

"You're crazy!"

"Do I act it? Listen. I know everything. More, in fact, than the governor knows of what goes on around these seas. The natives are my friends and so are the Arabs, but not the Chinese traders. Often a dhow takes me north and around the island and home again, so that I know the waters. You may think me a thief, but I'm honest. I steal to live, not because I enjoy it. I know where there is fifty thousand francs in gold. I want to take your schooner and get it, then go to Zanzibar or elsewhere and start life over. Help me, and I tell you what I know."

Murray's aquiline, harshly carved features expressed his new amazement. A boy starting life over! He wanted to laugh, but a lump came in his throat.

"Why, —— it!" he said awkwardly. "You want to take my schooner, eh? What about me?"

"Oh, you can come along," said the boy. "You'd not last long here ashore."

Murray started to laugh at that, but changed his mind as the sense of the last words reached to him. Gravity came on him, and he leaned forward, frowning. He was forced to take Carvahal at his own valuation. The boy had him nipped. What a shrewd little —— he was! Then that shrill voice said a strange thing, oddly gripping in its simplicity.

"Monsieur, it is true I am a boy who must live a man's life. But, consider! I am Carvahal. You might have worse allies."

Murray puffed at his cigaret.

"I believe you, Carvahal," he said at length. "But they'll think I've kidnaped you, and I don't want to get into trouble with the French here. I had arranged to leave early in the morning."

"I know," said the boy, his eyes suddenly shining. "You leave tonight or never, and you are in trouble already. Make your decision swiftly, while the tide is on the ebb, for if it turns, you can not get out of the harbor."

Murray swore softly, and his face tensed.

"Right," he said. "You win, my lad. Terms accepted. What's your news?"

The boy sucked his cigaret, then tossed the tiny butt to the floor.

"A message relayed to Sin Tock Lui, the chief Chinese trader here. Here is the message, which was, of course, in French. I could not get the name signed to it, which was Chinese." He read:

> "The stones stolen in Lourenço Marques are on schooner *Firefly*. Have detained and searched, if yet arrived Moroni.

"Now, monsieur, is the news worth while or not?"

Murray nodded frowningly.

"Aye. The cursed clever Chinks! They put two and two together. If this Sin Tock had me nabbed and the stones were found, he'd claim them. I couldn't verify my right in the courts, of course. I'd have to skip without them to save myself, and he knows it. Who's the man?"

"A big, lean Chinaman who hates me," responded Carvahal. "He brings in absinthe and cocaine and other things. He has two trading dhows, is very cruel and regardless of law."

"Good enough." Murray came to his feet. "Anything you want from ashore? No? Then let's get moving."

"You have a mate?" demanded the boy.

"He was killed at Lourenço Marques. Why?"

"Give me the place. I can handle a schooner or a dhow very well."

"Right. Come along, Mister, and wake up those men of mine. And no noise, mind!"

A fever of excitement in his eyes and face, the boy skipped on deck like a shadow, and Murray followed more leisurely. Haste was imperative, but it must be made slowly.

Fortunately there was no moon. Murray stood aft, studying the situation in the clear soft starlight. A slight swell, with a little breeze from the south. So far, good. Ashore the walled native town with its few big stone buildings and its crowded huts and bazaars and gowdowns lay all dark and the French residency back on the height was dark. No other craft were in harbor except a dhow lying aground at the head of the bay.

Not a light was to be seen anywhere, for beacons were lighted only when ships were due to arrive. The South Signal Point beacons were dark, and likewise the square stone tower on Suadzu Island, which lay outside the anchorage. Murray frowned. Without these harbor lights he could not possibly follow the channel out to sea.

Now he turned as the men approached him. They were brown, stalwart Arabs of Hadramaut and Yemen, whose ancestors had been seamen back in Roman days. Their white shapes flitted silent aft, and gathered, waiting. After a moment Carvahal came and stood by Murray, who laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. He must give the lad a fair chance. There was but one way.

"This," he said gravely, "is my son, who will act as my mate if his ability is such. It was to get him that we came here. Now we must leave. Accept his orders."

The Arabs murmured assent. They had been astonished and alarmed at sight of the lad arousing them. Now they were astonished no longer and, to their minds, all was explained. They were used to sudden comings and goings since they served Murray.

"Can you get us out without the beacons?" asked Murray.

"Of course," said Carvahal. "The light behind the town must be in line with the residency flagstaff, and I do not need the beacons to know where they and the Suadzu tower are. Let your anchor up. I'll take the helm and attend to the rest. Once outside the lee of the land, we'll get the monsoon. Ready, there!"

His treble crackled out orders in Swahili, and the Arab leaped to obey. In such fashion did Murray leave Moroni harbor. The new mate proved himself in those Arab eyes, which was no light matter.

II

MORNING found the *Firefly* bowling briskly along under the stout monsoon, land a blue blur on the horizon. Murray, by this time feeling rather amused by the whole course of events, came on deck and gravely relieved the boy.

"Breakfast is ready," he said. "Come below with me. We can leave her safely. You'll want some clothes. I've none small enough for you."

"No matter," said Carvahal. "I can cut them down. I'm used to that."

Murray swore under his breath and led the way below.

In the cabin he examined the boy more closely. His impressions of the previous night were confirmed. Carvahal was no half-caste, but was white. No doubt of it. More, a certain character stood marked in him, character beyond his years.

"These men of yours are good seamen," he observed gravely as the Arab cook brought them breakfast and fresh-ground coffee.

"They are," agreed Murray, smiling a little. "They ought to be. They have to be."

"In your business, yes."

That response made Murray chuckle to himself. The two got on famously. After a little Carvahal lighted a cigaret and leaned back.

"Now I must tell you something, monsieur."

"Ah! About the fifty thousand francs?"

"Partly, but more about that hungry-looking Chinaman, Sin Tock Lui. He will know that you have the diamonds. He will send his two dhows after you—will probably come himself."

Murray laughed.

"He'll have a wide search!"

"No." The boy's eyes were somewhat troubled. "No. He knows where to find us, you see. I was aboard the wrecked dhow, so I know where she is."

Murray's eyes raked him keenly, then the man took out his pipe and relaxed.

"Spill it, you clever little ——! I'd wager you made some noise last night so that I'd find you, eh?"

Carvahal nodded soberly.

"Yes. It was my only way. What good would the diamonds have done me if I had found them? But you found me, and then everything was all right.

Murray broke into a laugh.

"Go ahead, son. Let's have everything topside, now."

"I've been trying to get away from the island a long time, and they all laugh." Carvahal drew a deep breath, spoke rapidly. "They say I'm a half-blood, but I'm not. I know I'm not! I've had no money, nothing. I've slipped aboard dhows and schooners, and they always found me and brought me back or landed me up the coast. Well, this time it was different. This was a dhow from Majunga, going to Zanzibar for some Chinese traders. I got aboard her and hid. This was a year ago during the northeastern monsoon. You know how the weather here is, at that time? Hurricanes come every day, and electrical storms."

Murray nodded thoughtfully.

"We were a day and a half out, and I had not been discovered, when a hurricane hit us all in a moment," pursued the boy. "Lightning struck the dhow and killed the *rais* and half the crew and set fire to her. The others put off in the boat and were drowned. The rain put out the fire. That night she went on a reef and I got ashore. Three days later a native fishing boat picked me up and brought me back to the island."

"Hm!" said Murray, puffing at his pipe. "You're the only one who knows her position?"

"Yes. The island is known, but no one else knows where the wreck is, and even then the gold would be impossible to find. Sin Tock knows I know, and I have refused to tell. Twice he caught me and would have tortured me but natives helped me away from him each time. The natives do not love him nor the Hindu traders, either. Now he'll know where we are going."

"So?" Murray smiled slightly. "Fifty thousand francs, eh?"

"In gold, French money. It is illegal. It should have been turned back to the government, but no one did it. It is worth much more than the paper money now, when melted down. It may be more than fifty thousand. I only know the bazaar gossip."

"Good," said Murray, and nodded. His firm face was very kindly. "We'll get it for you, son, and give you a new start in life."

Abruptly the boy's lip quivered.

"Eh?" said Murray. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only—nobody ever called me that name before."

"What name?"

"Son. I—I thank you, monsieur."

Like a startled wild thing, Carvahal leaped from his chair and was gone, perhaps to hide his outburst of boyish emotion. Murray did not follow, but went on deck, mouthing soft curses. When he was at the top of the companionway, he stopped and looked down.

"Monsieur!" came the quavering treble, and he saw the boy standing there staring up at him. "I forgot to tell you. The course is for Putiala reef. Look out for a northwesterly current of two knots an hour."

Carvahal disappeared.

At the wheel was Ibrahim, an old and venerable-looking Arab with gray beard and wrinkled countenance, who assumed a paternal position to the remainder of the crew and who was a most expert thief, an accomplished murderer and a seaman without equal. Murray would have trusted this man with his life. He approached him and nodded greeting.

"Well, Ibrahim! Can this new mate of mine hold his job?"

"As Allah liveth, *rais*, he can!" A laugh crept into the wrinkled brown face. "A worthy son of his father is he in all truth. Although," added Ibrahim, "there are words upon his tongue such as he never learned in his father's house."

Murray could well believe it. He knew he had not caught an angel by any means, but was not in the least worried. As for the men's thinking Carvahal his son—well, let it pass. It would make them the more willing to obey the boy. He had meant to set the statement aright to them, yet now he deliberately refrained. He would not easily forget what Carvahal had just said—how nobody had ever called him that name before.

"By Allah, there is unrighteousness in this world!" he exclaimed.

"True, *rais*," agreed the old Arab unctuously. "It is not every man will be seized by the forelock in the last day and lifted from the fire!"

"Hm!" grunted Murray. "Did you ever hear of a Chinese trader named Sin Tock Lui?"

Ibrahim squinted across the sunlit waters for a moment.

"Not lately, *rais*, not in the past five years. Before it, there was one so named in business at Yemen."

"A hungry-looking man, and of cruel heart?"

"Aye, may Allah blast all such infidels! The same. A lustful man. It was said that no woman was safe within a mile of his quarters."

"The same has been said of you, father of lies, and with some truth."

"Allah upon me!" sighed Ibrahim. "That was in the day when a compliment to any damsel was a declaration of love. But now, when I make a declaration of love, it is but a compliment. Allah recompense me in Paradise! However, this yellow infidel had in all truth a bad name for many things, being a user of poison, very greedy after gold in dark ways and one who introduced the using of vile drugs, whereto *kif* was as perfume. He disappeared one day and left dead men in his house. So much I know, no more."

"Hm!" said Murray thoughtfully. "That man knows where we are going. He has two dhows. He knows we are going after some gold which he thinks belongs to him."

"Then," returned Ibrahim, a glow coming into his eyes, "this unripe pomegranate of thine, *rais*, this yet unbranded camel, this unshod stallion foal, this tender sprig of the date, shall look upon the death of men! Not that I believe it will be any very new thing to his eyes. Allah avert the omen, but they hold a strange wisdom."

"Half a point off your course, you garrulous old pirate!"

"Nay, *rais*, a sudden shift in the wind."

"Does the monsoon shift? Does the sun run from west to east?"

Laughing at the discomfited old rascal, Murray went below again and got out his charts, thumbed his pilot and presently discovered what manner of place was his destination. This Putiala reef was, oddly enough, a tiny islet of coral rock, doubtless upthrust by some volcanic turmoil, crowned by a forty-foot jungle of wild hibiscus and other brush. It had no water, boasted no life, was two-thirds submerged at high tide and, because of its unreasonably wide and far-circling fringing reef, had been the grave of more than one incautious ship. Murray calculated that they should reach it the following day.

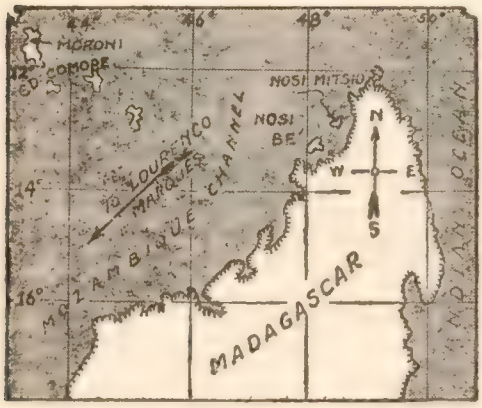
THE place afforded no sheltered anchorage, though at this season it was not highly important. Nearly all the Indian Ocean islets, large or small, were worth sticking a few men on and garnering the ocean harvest. But here were no turtle, no fish, no nuts, nothing by which life could be supported or money made, for at high tide the submergence made the islet only a little thing, flooding in over the reefs and washing away the usual sedentary life to be found in the average lagoon. All this and more, much more, did Murray gather from the pilot and the outspread sheet, for he was accustomed to read charts as other men read books, and thereby kept his life and liberty intact, not to mention his bank account. Yet when he had finished, there lingered with him the shrewd suspicion that the boy's head down in the cabins knew far more about Putiala and many another reef in these seas than he would ever know.

The chart-lines blurred before his eyes, the tobacco tasted sour in his mouth, the cabin seemed to crush him. Murray staggered a little as he made for the deck, wondering what could be wrong with him. Out in the rushing wind he felt better. He had never been ill a day, had never been laid up until that Italian destroyer caught him with a burst of shrapnel, knocked him out, forced him to run into the south and stay there a while! He cursed the change of boundaries which had so nearly destroyed him. Pity these European thieves of nations would not tell people when they swapped bits of plunder! Somaliland had entirely new borders these days.

Murray laughed a little. Now the Portuguese would probably be after him and, it might be, the French also. Well, so much the worse for them! He was safe enough in English waters and, out of them, would trust to his head. He was out of them now, but except for the diamonds, was safe enough. Not an illicit gun or ammunition-box aboard. And nobody would ever find the diamonds. He might have stayed at Moroni and stood a search easily enough, but that was not his way. Murray believed in taking no chances. Still, there was something indubitably wrong with his head this morning. He must have picked up a touch of fever at that cursed island.

Noon came, and with it appeared Carvahal on deck. The boy had just wakened

from slumber. When first seen, he was halfway aloft, a shrill burst of joyous laughter on his lips, scrambling about the rigging like a monkey while the men gaped up at his nimbly clambering and capering figure.



Then he was down on deck, standing before Murray, eyes all agleam, breath panting, boyishness leaping in him.

"There, M'sieu le Capitaine! Could any of these sons of Islam do it better? I am free, free! And I thank you."

"Right!" Murray laughingly clapped him on the shoulder. "Ah, no new clothes yet, eh? We must see to that. Now I'll turn over the deck to my mate, and we'll dine."

Boyishness fled, turned instantly into grave responsibility. Murray wondered at the swift change in the boyish face as it assumed age and experience, its impishness sweeping into alert cognizance of everything alow and aloft and abeam. The turned-up nose, the freckled features, the odd, heavy-lidded eyes, the set of chin—here was both boy and man.

They went aft together beneath the flapping awning for their meal. Some of the fresh fruit put aboard at Moroni was served them first. Murray munched at a blazing red pomegranate, spitting out the seeds over the rail, frowning at the flavor of it. Nothing seemed to taste right this morning. The boy eyed him, paused.

"What is the matter, monsieur? Your eyes look very strange."

"Eh? Nothing," and Murray laughed. "A bit of fever, perhaps. Haven't felt right all morning, somehow."

Ibrahim came to them, pawing his beard, dark anxiety in his eyes.

"*Rais!* Mutarrem Ibn Hamish is very sick down below. It is a strange sickness."

Murray looked up quickly and stiffened.

"Eh? What? You can't mean—"

Ibrahim shook his venerable head. In those seas there was no need of uttered word. Bubonic or cholera, those two ever-present perils, leaped into mind at the first touch of illness.

"Nay, *rais*, but as Allah liveth it is something very bad! Two other men say that they feel queer."

Carvahal leaped to his feet. His face was grayish-white, his eyes wide and fixed, his mouth open. He stood thus for an instant, then, with incredible speed, darted at Murray, tore the pomegranate from his hand, dashed it over the rail.

"The fruit, the fruit!" he cried out shrilly. "Where did you get it?"

Murray gave Ibrahim an inquiring frown.

"Where?"

"It came aboard last night, *rais*, an extra load beyond what you had ordered."

A wild cry broke from Carvahal, followed by a flood of obscene and blasphemous curses. Upon the boy was a raging fury. He seemed to have gone mad. To hear those unspeakable things from his lips was terrible.

"You fools, you fools!" he cried at last. "Throw it all overboard! Sin Tock has sent you poisoned fruit. Oh, fools that you are! He sent it last night after getting that message."

From Murray came a long whistle of amazement and belief.

"So that's it! Ibrahim, he's right. And I have the sickness too. Quick! Bring me the medicine chest from my cabin. Every man who has eaten fruit—aft here! Chuck the fruit over, too."

Ibrahim strode away, invoking Allah between groans and curses. Carvahal stood staring at Murray, eyes set in large anxiety. Murray laughed a little shakily.

"If it's poison, it's a queer sort," he said, and drew a hand across his eyes. "Some Malagasy drug, perhaps. So that's it, eh? I should have thought. Ibrahim said the man was famous for poisonings."

"And I can do nothing!" said Carvahal in a mournful voice. "If we were back at the island, I know the native herbs, I could—"

"Cheer up," said Murray, forcing confident words to conceal the swift dismay and fear tearing at his brain. "We're a pretty capable crowd aboard here, old son. We

may be fools, but we can cope with most things. Ibrahim has an Arab pharmacopia of his own, and we'll pull through, but if I go under for a while, you'll have to run the craft."

His mouth tightened slightly. The first touch of pain ran through his vitals.

Ibrahim appeared in mad haste with the medicine chest and behind him the men came flooding aft. They were frightened, but they remained silent and imperturbable. They were used to meeting crises and, although this was something new, their confidence in Murray was absolute. It shone from their eyes, it was patent in their bearing, in their quick laughter, in their words; it was the perfect confidence of children. Murray, staring back at them, repressed the helpless groan that came to his lips.

"Upon some of you is the poison and upon me, also," said Murray, speaking to them with his usual calm. "Who is man to escape his destiny? The event is in the hand of God. Meanwhile, here is my son to take command if I become helpless. Ibrahim, I charge you with his care!"

"Charge Satan with the care of a devil!" said Ibrahim in his beard. "We obey his father's son, effendi."

"Good. Get out your own medicines, Ibrahim. Overlook nothing. Every belly must be emptied. Carvahal, have you eaten fruit? What about breakfast?"

"I took only coffee," murmured the boy.

Murray opened the medicine chest and fumbled through it feverishly. The pain was growing upon him now.

III

MIDAFTERNOON found Murray stretched out on the afterdeck, racked by pain and fever, unconscious. He had refused to be taken below, preferring the deck and choosing death in the open if he must have it. Such an end seemed more likely than not, for the man Mutarrem was dead at one bell in the afternoon.

This left thirteen in the crew, apart from Murray. If he carried a large crew, he had need of them at times. Of the thirteen, seven were down with the poison, leaving Carvahal, Ibrahim and five others on their feet. They, indeed, were but staggering shadows, echoing the groans of the sick men, for both Murray and the old Arab had dealt out drugs with liberal measure. Luckily there would be no need to touch a line until sunset, for the monsoon might lighten or blow harder, but it would not shift before night.

Ibrahim, knowing what he himself had eaten that day and, having no mind to physic himself for nothing, slyly palmed most of the medicine Murray gave him, but he had kept a sharp eye on Carvahal. It was a very unhappy boy that joined him at the wheel later in the day.

"Eh, the course, O father of iniquity?"

"As set, O son of shame!" returned Ibrahim, chuckling. "Little dove with white cheeks, what will you do when the sun has gone down and the wind shifts, eh? Can you see your way across the green desert by the stars?"

"No, but I can see it now," said the boy, reaching out. "Give me the wheel. Go you and bury Mutarrem, for he lies below forgotten. Allah upon you, fool, go!"

The old seaman went, leaving Carvahal at the wheel, white-lipped but determined.

The afternoon wore on into sunset, the wind fell before making its nightly shift, and another of the men died. The remainder were like in case with Murray, hot with fever and muttering in delirium. The only quite normal man aboard was old Ibrahim. If he puffed away at his vile-smelling *kif* and made lewd jokes and reviled every one within hearing, Carvahal noted that he also worked twice as hard as the others in caring for the sick men and watching the craft. So at sunset when they lay becalmed Carvahal blasphemously berated the old man for a lazy scoundrel, they grinned together and were firm friends.

The night wind arose and swept them on their way, but brought no change in the condition of the poisoned men except that toward morning Murray and the others alike sank into a deep and terrible coma. The wind was failing and dawn at hand when one of the well men called Carvahal from his slumber. Two of the men were dead, and they thought Murray and the others dying.

The boy leaped on deck and found Ibrahim squatted beside the mattress whereon Murray lay, scarce breathing.

"There is nothing to do, little flying bird," said the old man gravely, "except to wait and watch him die. If he and the others live until the sun comes, they may recover."

"Why?" demanded Carvahal, impatient

of his helplessness and filled with a boyish wonder at this saying.

Ibrahim scratched his gray whiskers reflectively.

"Is not God the lord of the daybreak? That is reason enough."

The four men who still breathed were brought on deck, and all awaited the lightening of the eastern sky. As it came, death rattled in one man's throat, but Murray breathed softly and faintly. The grayness lifted and widened, and grew into clearer light. Presently the eastern horizon yellowed, and the sky broke into iridescence that deepened into flame, and all the moving waters were a mass of liquid golden fire. As the sun-rim appeared, Ibrahim and the five with him bowed upon the deck and, faces to the north, recited a swift prayer, the rolling rhythmical words beating sonorously upon the boy's ears while he stood watching the white face of Murray.

"Does he live?" queried Ibrahim, half rising.

"Aye," said Carvahal.

The old man came to his feet.

"Then carry the other three below again, for death has come and gone and the angel is winging elsewhere. Praise to the Compassionate, the Merciful!"

So it seemed, in truth, for the pallor of Murray's cheeks was touched with faint color and his breathing deepened into regular slumber.

Presently breakfast was served and the sails tended to catch the rising breeze of day. When his pipe was alight, Ibrahim joined the boy in the stern. Carvahal lighted one of Murray's cigarets and frowned portentously.

"I know what you want, old vulture of ill omen! Plans."

"May Allah requite thy lack of respect for my gray hairs! It is true. We are six men living and three who can do naught for a long while."

"And I," said Carvahal with significance.

"And he," said Ibrahim with greater significance, pointing with his pipe to the figure of Murray. "When he is like that, there is but one thing to do. Seek some solitary place and hide head like a sick dog until he is able to take charge again. Otherwise, peril will be upon us. He must not be put into danger."

"Is not Allah in the solitude as in the crowded harbor?" Carvahal spoke with a bitter and sardonic irony that drove deep. "You forget that I am here, and your place is to obey."

"Speak and I will consider."

Anger lightened the gray eyes of the boy.

"May your head be shaved and —— seize on you, old goat! He told you to obey. When I next tell you, it will be with a knife-point."

Ibrahim did not grin, but searched that youthful face thoughtfully, appraisingly. He recked not of his own safety, but of Murray's life and liberty. Were the latter in danger, he would not hesitate to put his knife into this boy, son or no son. So much spoke from his eyes, and Carvahal made haste to forestall any defiance.

"Thus would he speak, were he sitting here," he said quietly. "Three of my men have been slain, and it is not my way to accept such things tamely. By Allah, the slayer shall pay a deep price, a greater *diyat* than the law of the book sets for him to pay! Eh, Ibrahim?"

"Even so, little brother to the sword," and the old man nodded, a hawk-like gleam of cruelty in his eyes. "Yet there is a time for paying and a time for waiting."

"And a time for obeying." Carvahal tossed away his cigaret and sat up. "Listen! We go to a place called Putiala reef, there to seek the wreck of a dhow whereof I know. To this same place comes the yellow man, Sin Tock Lui, he who has slain our men and laid the others sick. He seeks me that he may find the wreck of that dhow. He also seeks *Rais* Murray here, in order to kill him and plunder this ship of certain diamonds."

Ibrahim clicked his tongue at that and stared.

"Allah upon you, little infidel. How can the yellow devil know of those stones?"

"Because he is a devil," said Carvahal with conviction, and the other nodded sagely. "Now, I know these waters as the palm of my hand, and I have certain plans in mind. I shall fight this yellow man and make him pay a huge blood-price for our slain men. We have the course for Putiala reef, but we have no other course. And neither you nor I can navigate a ship and find any certain spot on the rim of the world. Now speak. Obey or dispute?"

"Hm!" said Ibrahim. "We have no diving equipment aboard. How will you search a wreck without a suit?"

Carvahal grinned.

"Leave that to me, grandfather of iniquity! Do you obey or dispute?"

"I obey."

"Good. There are weapons somewhere aboard this ship. Where are they hidden?"

Ibrahim's eyes narrowed.

"That is not for me to say—"

Swift as a flash darted the boy's arm, and his knife-point actually scratched into the side of Ibrahim's throat so that the blood came, and the old man sat stark in fear of death.

"You fool!" cried Carvahal shrilly, savagery in his twisted features. "Will you never learn to obey quickly?"

"Allah upon you, imp of——!" exclaimed Ibrahim, divided between sharp fright and anger, and shamed because the helmsman was observing him. "Have I refused to obey?"

"Speak," snapped the boy, and scratched with the keen point.

"Behind the bulkhead in the saloon cabin. It is a secret place. In the back of the wardrobe is a keyhole, and the key to it is in the pocket of *Rais* Murray."

"Very well. Now reflect on these things, and consider that my father's son is here to be obeyed." Carvahal leaped to his feet. "Also, the French are probably seeking *Rais* Murray by this time, so the quicker we get our business done and get out of these waters, the better—for him."

The boy went to Murray's prone figure and bent over it, searching the pockets. Ibrahim sat and plucked at his gray bead, watched Carvahal from beneath his shaggy brows, and a slow smile grew in those keen old eyes of his. Presently Carvahal found what he sought and went below.

There, with the cabin door locked and secure against interruption, the boy opened the cupboard beside the chart locker and lifted out the contents, consisting largely of garments. He saw no keyhole, though the rear of the cupboard sounded hollow. Presently he observed a small knot-hole and thrust his key into it, almost idly. To his surprize, the key fitted and turned. A cunningly contrived door, a whole panel of the cupboard's facing, opened out and disclosed a deep and high compartment.

There before him Carvahal looked upon a dozen racked rifles with full ammunition belts, and automatic pistols. Besides these, a large dispatch box, unlocked, which he drew out and opened. In it he found papers, which did not interest him, being in English. Rolls of gold sovereigns, which he examined in wide-eyed wonder; sheafs of black and white five-pound notes, which he ignored; finally a small leather bag, lumpy. This he brought out and opened, and from it turned into the palm of his brown hand a dozen large irregular pebbles.

These dull things—diamonds? True enough, for he had heard many a tale in the bazaars. Nonetheless, his face wrinkled up scornfully, and the eager anticipation in his eyes turned to disdain, then to bitter anger.

"For these stones, these gray dead pebbles, men have died, and for them *Rais* Murray and the others have been poisoned by that yellow ——! So much the worse."

Presently he thrust back the dispatch box and took down one of the automatic pistols, delight glinting in his eyes. He examined it uncertainly, carefully removed the magazine and load, soon discovered just how it worked. A sudden shout from the deck above wakened him. He closed the secret cupboard, pocketed key and pistol, hung up the concealing garments and made his way swiftly to the deck.

A man aloft had sighted Putiala reef, still invisible to those on deck.

"Hm!" reflected the boy, standing beside old Ibrahim. "She's only visible for ten miles at best. We'll be there in an hour. We'll have the afternoon to work, for certainly we've beaten Sin Tock and his dhows. He can't get here until some time tonight, perhaps tomorrow morning. Good!"

"You will serve out the rifles?" demanded Ibrahim.

The boy glanced at him sidewise.

"To whom are you speaking?"

"To you, little palm shoot."

"Speak to me then," was the curt response.

"Eh?" Ibrahim stared for a moment until suddenly comprehending. "Well, then! Do you serve out the rifles, *rais*?"

"That is my business, not yours," said the boy. "Make ready one of those boats. Not the thin-sheathed boat, which is easily pierced by coral, but the other. With luck, we shall do our business here and get away before night."

Ibrahim looked after him as he strode away.

"By Allah, what a man will be here when

the beard is grown!" he muttered admiringly. "*Rais*, eh? We shall see. But I think we have a *rais*, indeed, a little one ,yet worthy to be his father's son. Hm! Only God knows all things."

IV

NOON saw them drawing in toward the island, and not so much as the sail of a Sakalava fishing boat in sight. The not uncommon noonday calm had fallen, with only a slight breath of air and a current to bear them closer under scant steerage-way, yet even this was all Carvahal wanted as he stood at the helm beside the frowning Ibrahim and played the spokes back and forth. The old Arab was puzzled, for Carvahal headed past the island, not for it.

Two men were up aloft watching for coral, but this was difficult to see with the water smooth as glass and the sun full overhead. A reef shows up best when the surface is ruffled and the sun well behind. The tide was low, the island and a little of the fringing reef being fully exposed, breasting the schooner with its two miles of length—a long, high, unbroken tangle of greenery like a vivid green bar surcharged on the ocean surface. Scarcely three hundred yards across at the thickest, this narrow two-mile line of brush was almost impenetrable to man, as Carvahal well knew from his own experience. Landed here on one side of it, a man, unless armed to cut his way through the mass, would be unable to reach the other side except by skirting the whole island.

"Where is this wreck you spoke of?" demanded Ibrahim suddenly. "Know you the place, *Rais* Carvahal?"

The boy nodded, lifted his arm and pointed off to their right, then his vigilant eyes swept back to the blue surface ahead.

"But you are going around the island!"

"O Ibrahim," said the boy, smiling a little, "are those gray hairs the product of venerable age or of youthful folly? What I do, I do."

The men grinned and Ibrahim muttered curses under his breath.

The schooner crawled along, and Carvahal sent a man into the bows with the lead, until presently she rounded the western end of the island, with the breeze picking up a bit, and headed in against the northern side. Just under the tip of brush, Carvahal called out swift orders. The canvas ran down, the schooner lost way, there was a splash and a rattle of cable.

"Get out a stern hawser and a long line yonder for swinging," ordered the boy, "then four will come in the boat with me, the two others remaining here."

He darted below. Ibrahim spat disgustedly and moved to obey.

Down in the cabin Carvahal opened the secret compartment and drew out two rifles with bandoliers, relocked the place and went back on deck. The boat was out with the stern kedge. He went to Murray's side and found the skipper in a profound and deep slumber, beginning to perspire, a good sign. Of the other sick men, none had either wakened or died, so it might be all would now live.

When the boat returned, Carvahal called the men aft and lighted a cigaret.

"Which of you remain here?" he demanded, and two made response. He gave them the rifles. "Keep a lookout. Do not depend on us. In case you see any other schooner or dhow approaching, slip the cables, get up a topsail and work back around the end of the island. If we are not in sight, then wake up your sick men, hoist all canvas and run. Come back when you can. Fire two shots to warn us if you do sight any dhow."

He motioned Ibrahim and the other three men into the boat, got down himself into its stern and told them to give way. The brown Arabs grinned cheerfully at him and at each other and fell cheerfully to work, old Ibrahim pulling with sudden revelation of giant muscles. The boat crawled from the schooner, while the boy in the stern watched carefully for coral as he skirted the island shore and turned the point to round that long bar of coral and jungle. Once around the island's end, the wall of green abruptly shut them off into another world with empty horizon on three sides.

Here the progress was slow. Inside that fringing reef, only a little exposed at low tide, showing here and there in a ripple or fang of upthrust coral rock, was a very wide lagoon or what should have been a lagoon. It was in reality a mass of coral, most of it living, very little of it exposed above the surface. This treacherous still water was of all depths, from a foot to eight fathom, and was accordingly of all colors from a light green to a vivid blue. The boat was forced

to zigzag back and forth along the channels and, despite all care, it twice scraped and was shoved off with difficulty. Old Ibrahim, sitting at the stroke oar facing the boy, grumbled unceasingly.

"In the name of Allah the Merciful, what good lies in this sweating work? No one can find a sunken wreck in this pit of ——, and there is none to be seen. Even if found, what would it avail? We have no diving suit, and even now I can see the fins of two sharks inside the lagoon, so one would be a fool to tempt the dispensation of God in naked skin! Nor could work be done without a suit. Now would be our time to draw off and be over the horizon ere those yellow infidels come upon us. Thus they would not know whither we had fled, and we might be safe from them."

Carvahal snarled an oath at him, but did not take eyes from water. The boy was in no mood to be taunted, yet he perceived that beneath these taunts was only the desire to discover his object, for old Ibrahim was possessed of a devouring curiosity.

The boat had proceeded for a mile along the south shore of the island, when Carvahal made a gesture of caution and the men paused on their oars. Standing up, the boy peered carefully about, examining the shore and the water around, searching for his bearings. His little figure, still clad in its old rags, was bareheaded, for he made light of the sun, and his hair was bleached to a tow-colored brown.

"Give way," he commanded, a sudden flash in his eyes. "Slowly!"

The boat moved as he stood, foot against the tiller to swing her around. Foot by foot she crept through a coral channel; she was three-quarters of a mile from the island and yet well within the circle of the enormous fringing reef. The four oarsmen watched him narrowly. Suddenly his hand went up and they paused. Carvahal abandoned the tiller and stood upright, staring down into the water, and they leaned over eagerly.

Below them, clearly outlined in no more than three fathom, was the broken half of a native dhow. This was the after end. The heavy pinned planking had broken amidships where there was no deck, and this stern rested in a cranny of the coral upon her port beam, so they could look down her canting deck, smashed and swept clear of bulwarks and other objects. A great hole was crushed in her side.

The smooth, almost noiseless drop into the water was startling, unexpected by any. Carvahal gave them no sign of his intent, but went suddenly, rags and all, flashing down into the green depths toward the wreck. It was as if he could not wait another instant, but must be at it, and old Ibrahim cursed the boy for an impetuous fool. They watched his lithe figure slant down unerringly. The cant of the deck showed a dark splotch where a door had opened in the break of the poop, and Carvahal vanished through the hole. Those above waited for what seemed an age, and nothing happened.

"Now by Allah and Allah!" quoth Ibrahim angrily, "this son of an unquiet father perverts the law of the world, for surely that father shall bury him if the body come to the surface."

An oarsman grinned. They waited through another eternity, and something moved in the depths. Swiftly, Carvahal emerged from the blackness into clear water, shot to the surface, grasped the gunnel of the boat and gasped as he clung.

"Thy knife, ancient father of iniquity!" he exclaimed at length with a grin.

Ibrahim bared the blade and handed it down. Carvahal took it between his teeth.

"Now back water," he ordered calmly. They perceived that in their absorbed interest they had allowed the boat to drift a little way from the wreck. They backed, and the boy lifted himself to get the strength of a plunge. He dove with the impetus, and for the second time his slim figure slid into the gaping hole and vanished from sight.

SWIFTLY something wavered into view; not the boy. This was a large, yellow-spotted fish, slowly floating upward, all its underside slashed open. Ibrahim laughed largely at this, hugely delighted.

"A killer with the soul of a killer!" he cried. "Was ever such an afrit thrust up from —— as this one?"

Carvahal, after a long interval, followed the limp fish, and now he bore a small canvas bag in one hand. After he had shot up and obtained a grip on the gunnel, he dropped the bag overside. Ibrahim leaned over with a gesture to help him aboard, but he held back.

"Cease! There are other bags and thy knife to come."

Those brown men in the boat were themselves fully competent to do such work as this, yet the boy's spirit held them in admiration. His flaming energy was past their comprehension, and lifted him at once into command over them. Four more journeys he made down into the bowels of the wreck. Each time he brought up one small, heavy bag, and the last time he fetched back the long knife between his teeth.

Then he let them haul him into the boat, and sat dripping water in the sternsheets, gasping a little as he rested. The five bags lay in a little heap between him and Ibrahim. Carvahal regarded the old Arab as the latter frowningly thumbed the edge of his knife before putting it up.

"A strong blade," said Carvahal. "I could not trust my own. Good for a gullet or an upward rip through flesh but too tender a blade for prying at wood and metal."

Ibrahim regarded him angrily.

"Eh? Little imp, dost thou despise the steel—"

"Hone it, Ibrahim, hone it!" and Carvahal laughed a little. "A fine edge is a matter of labor and some love. Or shall I put that edge aright for you? A slighted woman of the Swahili once edged a knife for the man, and I learned some secrets in watching her."

"From your cradle," gibed Ibrahim as he sheathed his blade.

"Aye," said Carvahal, "with the riding light swinging against the stars and the waters lapping as the nets ran out. Graybeard, years are not all." The boy sat up suddenly and took the tiller in his grasp. "If I had had a boat and men, strong men, all this little work would have been completed before that beard of thine was gray as now, and there had been no poisoning of my father. Yet who are we to question the decree of Allah? Give way! Give way lest this utter ease of gain run us to a way as twisted as these channels through the coral."

At his order the men fell to work and the boat moved, twining in and out, in and out. Ibrahim cast thoughtful eyes ever and again at the five little bags before him. Presently Carvahal reached out, still keeping hold on the tiller, and drew those bags toward himself until he could get his feet on them.

"Ibrahim," he exclaimed, "thou art a man of Hadramaut, and even if I could love thee as a father, yet as a son I could well divine thy thoughts. It is not for lack of trust that I put foot on these bags. I would trust thee, Ibrahim, to the full length of this boat if there were three strong men, or perhaps four, at the other end. Easy now! Slow, there!"

He conned them among shallows where they scraped breathlessly on sharp points of the living stuff down in the water. Ibrahim muttered soft curses at this incredibly cunning imp, the shame of a worthy father, the puffed-up cockerel whose spurs Murray would some day file to proper length and pointlessness. Carvahal, hearing, pretended not to hear and sat dumb except when directions to the men were needed. Presently he glanced back at their course, a tortuous and twisting road which edged them gradually closer to the other end of the island, and shook his head gravely.

"We had done better to have gone the other way," he murmured as if to himself only. "Between the dropping of the tide and the feebleness of this ancient Ibrahim, I fear Sin Tock may yet find us with divided forces."

Ibrahim opened his mouth to reply with the most forcible stream of abuse he could summon up at short notice, but he did not speak. For, from somewhere beyond the curtaining wall of the island's green scrub, came two rifle shots, distinct and shocking in the still heat of the afternoon. Carvahal half started to his feet, then relaxed, staring as if to pierce with his keen sight that curtain of tangled green.

"Allah upon you!" cried Ibrahim angrily. "This is what comes of forespeaking and setting evil influences to work. May God avert the omen!"

"Sin Tock Lui," said Carvahal, his eyes very alert and eager. He swept into a curving channel through the coral, heading them toward the island. "Allah befools us only to make us wise. I felt all the time it was too easy. Stop work, there!"

They drifted a while, and he scanned the waters as if carrying in his head a map of the undergrowth. Presently he signed the men to give way once more, and the brown arms stiffened to the task.

They came to a spot, some fifty yards from the head of the island, where mangroves made a wild tangle beyond the solid footing of land, the tide now falling. With the knife he had considered too weak an

article for prying open the hiding place of the little bags, Carvahal slashed at creepers and growth. Stern first, the boat backed into what was revealed as a tiny channel, with Ibrahim's gaunt muscles laboring at his side. The boat was gradually forced through the tangle.

The sweat rolled down the brown faces, stinging their eyes, though they were all lean men in perfect condition and inured to the heat. Here under the green growth was no least breath of wind. They worked fiercely. For without the utterance of a word all realized that they must, if possible, get the boat hidden before Sin Tock finished with the schooner and rounded the point to discover them. They had heard those two shots, but nothing else.

Carvahal wondered what could have chanced. Had Sin Tock come on the schooner unawares and won it almost without a fight or was he still away on the horizon, those two shots a warning signal for urgent hurry? He had acted on the first supposition. Now he doubted whether he should not have conned out the boat from the intricacies of the reef and gone straight back to Murray. Yet this would have taken a full hour's time. Better to reach land and find a vantage point whence they could discover the real reason for the signal.

Only when the boat was well up among the mangroves and scrub, which grew down and overhung into the water, was Carvahal content. The Arabs now obeyed him without question, for he had proved himself in their eyes. And Arab trust, once given, is not recalled without good cause. After the boat was screened, they rested for a moment or less, and Carvahal gestured down to the little bags.

"We will each carry one," he said, briefly.

"Oh precious scandal of the coast," responded the old Arab, "and whither shall we carry them?"

Carvahal turned to the impenetrable wall of green which confronted them.

"Through that, O precious example in degeneracy!" he made calm response. "Thy knife and my knife and all the other knives. Cut!"

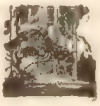
They cut.

They set to it as did Heracles to the cleansing of the Augean stables. They made a writhing, twisted way, yard by yard, slashing and forcing a slow progress toward sight of what had chanced beyond the island curtain. Foot by foot they gained forward across the narrow island where no man had gone before them. And as they slaved, Ibrahim cursed with more feeling than usual. He was a man born and bred to the sea, and this was no task for honest or dishonest seamen.

Perhaps, at least, this caused his curses. Or perhaps it was that he feared lest Carvahal had erred in not returning straight to the schooner. For though at Murray's word the old Arab obeyed Carvahal and vastly admired the uncanny cleverness of the boy, he loved Murray as a man of his kind may at times. He would have flung twenty Carvahals to Sin Tock in the interests of one Murray.

Carvahal knew this perfectly well, and was better friends with Ibrahim because of it.

V



IT WAS mid-afternoon when they dragged the boat into its shelter. The sun was well down toward the horizon by the time they came to the crest of the island ridge, so slow was their progress. Yet all the while they had been hidden. This course had been chosen and they must stick to it. They might have done better to have returned straight to the schooner.

Here on the island backbone the scrub was somewhat thinned out, and it was possible to get ahead with less difficulty. Carvahal presently climbed a thick stem that thrust up amid the multitudinous growth, wormed his way upward, and for a space sat there among the leafy thickets as if in meditation. He stared away to the eastward with a rapt expression that quite ignored the impatience of Ibrahim and the other men. They knew well enough that open water was within a hundred yards of them, but did not know what might be passing there and so dared not call out. Sin Tock Lui might be within hearing for all they could tell.

Then Carvahal descended, still very thoughtful. Ibrahim, by the expression on the boy's face, perceived that it was no moment for abuse.

"*Rais*, what is it?" he demanded.

"It is a gunboat, and French," said Carvahal. "They must have slipped their cable at sight of the smoke smudge on the horizon, for the schooner is well away

toward the shoals. Her sail is a little cloud off to the east."

"And the gunboat?" queried Ibrahim.

"Passes, even now."

"Hm! We have no food."

Ibrahim mused frowningly, glancing to right and left, obviously disconcerted by the flight of the schooner. If he had been on the water, all would have been different. Here in this jungle he felt helpless and ill at ease.

"No *kif* to smoke, you mean," mocked the boy. "Will they have food on the schooner by nightfall, spawn of Eblis? My father can well risk the shoals, but a shell can reach across the shallows, and the tradewinds are no match for Belleville tubes. Come, Ibrahim! Do we sit here to await the event or do we run out the boat? I am *rais*, by his word, and yet this is a sore strait and we had best consult as man and man."

"Allah alone knoweth all things and what will come to us," returned Ibrahim. "If we put out the boat again and take to the water, then we sit on the waves between two horns—one the gunboat, the other Sin Tock. With these gold francs we might buy our lives from Sin Tock Lui, yet from the gunboat there is no purchase. They seek what *Rais* Murray carries, and we are his men. Until they have the stones, they would hold us captive. And you, little *rais*, would go back whence you came. Thus—if we take to water."

"Yet, if we stay here on the island?"

"Then, if it be the will of God, we starve," said Ibrahim. "For how shall any man feed in this place?"

"Thy knife, Ibrahim," said Carvahal, and took it.

The others watched him and Ibrahim, waiting without a word as good men will upon occasion.

"Now may Allah guide the blade!" he pursued. "Haft to the ground, we go to sea and fight Sin Tock or run from the gunboat as we must. Point to ground, and we are landsmen on a new world, though small, fort his night if no more."

So tiny was the open space in which they stood that, as Carvahal spun the knife in air, the three seamen and Ibrahim crouched away from it hastily. The blade twirled and glittered in the level westering rays of the sun, came back down into shade and quivered on its point in a root, which ran above ground.

"So," said Carvahal. "It is decided, and we stay. I would not use my own knife, lest the point be dulled. A good blade deserves every care."

"Eblis swallow thee in the depths of ——!" growled Ibrahim, retrieving his knife.

"Nay." Carvahal grinned. "Thy *kif* is all aboard the schooner and, since we wait here, she may come back to us. Otherwise we must sit here until Sin Tock has come and gone again, and then we must head east for water. Two little days of rowing, venerable father of all iniquity, and the task will be done, unless the gunboat interferes."

The situation was not pleasant. Against the bole up which Carvahal had climbed did Ibrahim now lean, and he cursed as few men could curse, even Arab men. He flayed Sin Tock Lui and sank the gunboat, and then he came to more immediate surroundings and gave them his most earnest attention. He made of the island an ash heap, and when Carvahal laughed, began on the boy. But by this time his breath was running short.

"Talk makes for thirst," said Carvahal.

Mocking though it might be, the warning had a bitter spice of truth in it, and after this Ibrahim cursed no more.

Now it was no great matter to gain the shore beyond, and they did so before the day was gone. The sun dipped and darkness showed them a light on the eastern horizon beyond the point where the thinning funnels of the gunboat had sunk to the water. The gunboat herself carried lights enough to make a liner envious, and it was Carvahal's turn to curse as he watched them, for they carried something of a festal air.

The gunboat was heading on a diagonal course to the northeast, and clear ahead of her showed that clear faint speck, a flaunting challenge offered by Murray, as it were. Both Ibrahim and the boy wondered at it. Before the light utterly failed they noted how the gunboat twisted and circled among the shoals. Murray, or his two remaining men, was leading her a fine dance among those reefs where the schooner could slip away on a straight course, while the gunboat, with her deeper draught must, follow channels most carefully, and thus lose all the advantage given by her steam against sails. It was easy to guess that Murray played for darkness, and when the night concealed him

he would extinguish that masthead light and run down wind, so that by dawn he would be lost beyond finding.

"The center of the island is higher," said Carvahal, "and that tree makes a good lookout, Ibrahim. From there we can retreat in either direction. There is still Sin Tock Lui to think about, and our skins will twitch if he comes and discovers us."

Ibrahim nodded, and they worked back along their trail to the ridge of the island. Without water or food, unarmed save for their knives, they were in sorry plight and realized it. Not for a moment did any one doubt that Murray would come back for them in the end, but with his scant crew and Sin Tock Lui to face, even if he escaped the gunboat, they might have days to wait; and one day under the tropical sun, in their present case, would be all too much.

They carried the bags of gold back to the ridge and Carvahal stacked them among the roots of the lookout tree, and they settled down to wait. Twice in that first hour they caught the boom of a gun, and the flash of shell-burst. Watching from his post, Carvahal could make out no result. The gunboat's lights had become mere specks in the east, yet beyond them, distinct as ever, showed that solitary masthead light. Both Carvahal and Ibrahim wondered anew. Was Murray gone mad or were his men such fools as not to realize the folly of that swinging light? Ibrahim murmured growling oaths, as was his way. As other men might seek solace in drink or drugs, the old sinner sought relief in swearing. It was his anodyne.

"As though," said Carvahal sarcastically, "beseeching Allah to change the captain of the gunboat into a black pig with six crooked legs would bring *Rais* Murray back here the sooner! *Ohé*, Ibrahim! There was once a fool and a man of Hadramaut, and when they stood side by side the fool was praised for his exceeding wisdom!"

"And once there was a boy on whom Eblis breathed," growled the Hazrami. "Then Eblis repented the waste of breath, and the boy begged him breathe again for the coolness of it."

Carvahal strained his eyes to the eastward as they stood together in the clear space under the tree.

"This is strange," he said. "The gunboat goes on, her lights grow small and mingle and yet beyond her shows the schooner's light, as a pinhead might gleam against velvet."

"What knowest thou of velvet, sand rat?" said Ibrahim ill-humoredly, soured by the prospect of the morrow.

The boy paid no heed.

"He has led them well enough through the shoals, yet in the end he must be caught," mused Carvahal. "And the light still shows, like a far star in mist."

It was true. With fair sailing, Murray's masthead light should have been under the horizon ere this, yet still it gleamed. The gunboat was running to the north of it, as if rounding the end of a reef. They could see the increase of distance between the speck and the grouped lights of the Frenchman. They had no clue to Murray's intent, no knowledge but that they must sit here on Putiala reef or else take to the open sea. With no food or water, they would have two days of hard rowing, since there was no sail in the boat, and Sin Tock Lui probably on the way to gobble them up.

The moonless night thickened over them, and the stars were veiled in a haze that drifted high, yet leaving the water fairly distinct to a short distance. As the night wore on, the Arabs pulled their robes about them and growled for *kif* if not for food, while Carvahal philosophically disposed himself among the roots and snored until his cramped position wakened him in discomfort.

He sat up at this, recollected everything and cursed all French gunboats, all Chinamen, and all nights that stretched to such undue length as this one. Now it was Ibrahim's turn to laugh and jeer.

"A babe for complaint and a man for endurance, O *rais!*"

"An Arab for conceit and a Hazrami for dull folly," shot back the boy. "Let be, old fool, and nurse tongue between teeth. On the morrow it will crack when it is thrust forth!"

So they cursed each other, as understanding men may, and waited for the dawn.

MURRAY, while these things were passing on the island, was handling the situation in his own fashion, sitting on a coil of line beside the wheel and speaking ever and again to brown Yakub who held the spokes. Murray was too weak to stand or brace himself against the lean of the deck and

thrust of the schooner, but his head was clear enough.

Wakened at the first sight of a smoke smudge on the horizon, he had dragged himself up and ordered the cable slipped. By good fortune there was so much sail set that the two sound men could shake out the reefs, and the schooner darted away. Before the gunboat was within shelling distance, she was leading out over the reefs, while Murray prayed for darkness. Allah, who loves all good seamen, sent the nightfall in time to avert capture.

It was in Murray's mind that the Frenchman knew these waters as well as himself, if not better and, too, that he would know the most probable course to set. Thus the problem was to lose the gunboat and return to Putiala, the very last thing which the gunboat would suspect. Even if her commander knew about Carvahal's francs, he must be wondering why Murray had sought the reef, since those francs made a sorry fleabite beside the Soronho diamonds. One might risk the schooner for the diamonds but, having these, only a fool would peril himself and his craft for the sake of another fifty thousand francs.

Thus the problem: to lose the gunboat and return, picking up Carvahal and the men.

Murray was weak and empty, a pale travesty of himself. For a few moments at a time, when Yakub's absence was an imperative need, he rose and held the wheel, but was ever glad to relinquish it. Two of the sick men had wakened, tremulous and feeling sorry for themselves, and these were set to work cooking up some broth. Once the hot soup was downed all hands felt better. By that time, too, the sun had dropped away and two shells had spoken the intent of the Frenchman to capture or sink the schooner. By sheer fortune the wind did not fall.

With the mists of evening gathering and, after the gunboat had become a cluster of lights, Murray kept a man heaving the lead forward, being in a network of shoals. He held to the south for deep water. The gunboat tried her searchlight, but the mist was dense enough to render it useless, and the haze over the heavens made the night ideal for Murray, could he but make use of it.

Strengthened by the hot soup, he took the wheel while Yakub and the other man slung out one of the two boats. Mast stepped and reefed sail set, tiller lashed to hold her steady into the northeast, the schooner's light was extinguished and hauled down, while another was lighted and displayed at the boat's masthead. Murray hove to, the empty boat was lowered and the falls cleared. Lightless, the schooner drove away to the southward while the little boat danced away over the long rollers on her divergent course.

Murray fetched a circle for Putiala to avoid the gunboat, while the small craft's light slipped off across the shoals, with the Frenchman fetching an eastward circle to get clear of these. Murray laughed softly. Before the following noon he would have Yakub angling for the slipped cable while the gunboat would be puzzling out that mystery of an empty boat.

Unless—unless! There was still the evil personified in Sin Tock Lui, who knew of those Soronho diamonds. Now rapidly recovering from the effects of the poison, Murray made a meal, dozed while Yakub took the wheel, wakened and ate again. He sat smoking and thought of Carvahal on Putiala reef, of Sin Tock Lui, of the gunboat—a nest of tricked and angry men—and of what the morrow would bring forth. The gunboat was fooled, and her commander would surely run up Mombasa way upon discovery of the trick. He might make it an official matter and wireless every port along the coast. He might not. Anything was possible. There was no ownership in that parcel of diamonds except the ownership of possession.

"Hare and hounds all over again, and I'm the hare," muttered Murray, and chuckled a little in the darkness. "Well, a stern chase is a long chase! The only fly in the ointment is that confounded Chinaman."

He fell silent, frowning.

VI

THE first gray shades of dawn showed to Carvahal and his companions on the island the very thing they had feared and dreaded to see—a dhow feeling her way in under the western end of Putiala, rounding the point. She was evidently seeking the same anchorage where the schooner's slipped cable lay among the coral. Up in their little clearing among the trees Ibrahim resignedly folded his hands across his empty stomach and sighed.

"It is the will of Allah."

"Even so," said Carvahal, his eyes narrowed and not nice to see. Somehow they did not appear to be just the right kind of eyes for a mere boy to own.

From the screened point of vantage Carvahal watched how Sin Tock Lui's dhow dropped anchor and laid out a kedge. It was all curiously like yesterday, a repetition which had in it some quality of reality, because of its expectedness, its inevitability. Carvahal even foresaw the next step, and smiled to himself when a whaleboat was dropped into the water, five oarsmen and one man in the stern going into her. A significant fact here: one does not use a whaleboat in such water unless perfectly sure of himself, since a scrape on the sharp coral would splinter the thin sheathing. Somebody knew these waters well.

The whale boat started around the island. Carvahal, bidding the men wait where they were, went back along the trail to where his own boat lay hidden. Presently the whaleboat came into sight, heading in among the coral, threading her way delicately but rapidly. The tide was well past the ebb now. Carvahal himself, in retrieving the francs, had chosen the right hour. The depth was so slight that Sin Tock, if he found the wreck, might send a man down to her. At the same time, he had no knowledge of the secret hiding place that held the gold, and a man might nose around the dark hull for twenty trips without finding the storage place. It was this certain knowledge which had given Carvahal his whole advantage. It was for lack of this knowledge that Sin Tock had been unable to seek and retrieve the gold.

Now the whaleboat slowed. Far more cautiously than the schooner's boat under the guidance of Carvahal, yet no less surely, it scraped along the perplexities of the fringing reef and then swooped in toward the wreck. Carvahal sat marveling. He had certainly told nothing, and yet this devilish yellow man knew where to search! That might be explained in a hundred ways. The fact itself was the thing. Sin Tock knew where the wreck lay.

Carvahal shrank back among the roots lest an incautious movement betray him, and became very still. The boat was edging nearer. Not one man sat in the stern, as he had thought, but two—Sin Tock and another. The lean, evil-looking Chinaman held the tiller with one hand; the other hand grasped a knife, and the point of this knife was between the shoulder-blades of the man at his side.

And seeing this, Carvahal perceived that the man's arms were strapped down tightly, until he looked like a mummy as he sat there, and a badly frightened mummy at that. A little breath of comprehension escaped the boy. He recognized the man now, one of the crew from this lost dhow. There had been another survivor, then! Sin Tock Lui had found and brought him on this errand—just too late.

Yet, as Carvahal well knew, the quest of the sunken francs was now only a minor affair in the eyes of the yellow man. His main object was the schooner which carried the Soronho diamonds. Could Sin Tock have guessed at the bargain between Carvahal and Murray, that he had come here thus? Or did he think that Murray, with Carvahal aboard, would never pass on without retrieving the francs? It was of little consequence. He was here in any event.

Something stirred slightly, and Carvahal turned to see old Ibrahim a little behind him, staring at the boat and muttering curses. A gesture from the Arab, and Carvahal realized what was in that shrewd brain. Here was Sin Tock, groping toward the emptied wreck which he imagined still held the treasure. Now he was a good hour distant from the dhow—it would take him all of that to get back through the coral—not to mention the work of diving. Carvahal reproved himself, for the lack of forethought caused him to leave the schooner without a single firearm. Sin Tock and his men were obviously armed with rifles and pistols.

"How many men left aboard the dhow?" asked Carvahal softly.

"Twelve," returned Ibrahim, and the boy whistled to himself.

He made a gesture, passed the Arab, and the latter followed him along the little trail they had hewn clear. They came to the ridge again, and the waiting men. Carvahal cautiously sought an opening and stared at the dhow. The men aboard her were keeping no watch of any kind, but seemed to be eating. The boy's mouth watered and his forehead wrinkled in anger. Eating!

The island and the dhow were in the middle of an empty world, the horizon

blank so far as it showed to them. Into this world Murray might come today or tomorrow, or might be held away until they lay dead among the mangroves. Thirst, even more than hunger, kills swiftly and surely. The boy nudged old Ibrahim, who sat lost in the fatalistic gloom of his kind, awaiting the will of Allah.

"Ibrahim, we will swim out to the dhow while that spike of yellow sewage searches for what lies not in the wreck. Five good men—"

"Unarmed," grunted Ibrahim.

Carvahal stretched forth his hands.

"Hast not thou also two arms, tearless buzzard? Two arms and a knife to each of us. A slow swim so that we keep our strength, for they have no watch set. Then to slide over the side of the dhow. Water and food, Ibrahim, and *kif*. Shall we watch them give up and go away or sit here to be discovered if they land and make search? Venerable portion of carrion, I tell you death sits on this reef as on the dhow! If we hunt him down he may flee from us, but he loves to strike when a man cowers and hides."

He turned and beckoned to the other men. They had heard, exchanged a look, and then with a nod followed him with Ibrahim. They stole down to where great fleshy leaves with pendant bunches of half moss, half seaweed, drooped along like a curtain above the tortured masses of mangrove roots between high tide and low. Then Carvahal came to a sudden halt, as he spied something on a root.

"Thy knife, Ibrahim," he whispered, though not in the whisper that carries like speech.

Ibrahim half drew his knife, then snicked it back into the sheath. He had caught the glint in Carvahal's eyes and had seen the shellfish attached to a root.

"Nay, man-child, use thine own!"

Carvahal grinned and plunged greedily at the shellfish. The Arabs regarded him curiously but refused to share his feast. Presently he patted his stomach.

"A full man fights worst, a fed man best," he said. "Ibrahim, it must be a strong religion that holds back when the belt is tightened! When I am past fear of being hungry, I will become a Moslem that it may hold me in the day of temptation."

With this gibe he stared out to sea through the screen of roots and brush. He gripped the arm of Ibrahim and drew him forward.

"Look! From the level of the water they can not see us unless they come and peer over the side. They will be watching for Sin Tock, not for us."

"True, child of sin! Yet that dhow is a mile from here and a mile out from the island shore there. It is a long swim. And what of sharks?"

"No sharks are here." Carvahal pointed to the discolored waters. "It is yellow, the same as around the Nosi Mitsio Islands, so men say. I think it is safe. But—ah, wait! The swim is long, I know what we can do."

The boy's eyes glittered with eagerness of his thought.

"Look, then! We will cut some of this heavier brush to float us, with moss to hide our faces. There is some of it there and there, borne out on the tide. We will push out from this point here, swimming straight out for a little way. We will catch the current once we get out from shore. It will drift us directly down to the bows of the dhow, while they watch from the stern for Sin Tock Lui. Once we get to her, old vulture face, the rest is in the hands of Allah—until I lay hands on a pistol!"

"Truly thy father's son!" exclaimed Ibrahim admiringly.

He could not understand why Carvahal drew away and winced a little.

"First wait here!" said the boy. "Be cutting the brush until I return."

He returned along the trail, forcing his way along that tortuous road they had cut until he reached the other side of the island. There he watched the whaleboat. He saw a naked man come up and clutch the gunnel while Sin Tock leaned over to give instructions. After a moment the man in the water curved suddenly and dived like a porpoise. Waiting for no more, Carvahal drew back. There were two hours or more —plenty of time.

He returned to the others. It was a desperate chance they were taking, yet still more desperate seemed the chance of being left on the island. The Arabs were eager enough to put the matter to the test of fate, and had cut quantities of a light, spongy wood with leaves small and fern-like. These were carefully interwoven in patches and strewn with moss. Then, with the launched patches sheltering them, they

swam out at right angles to the direction of the dhow, swam until arms and legs ached and the hot morning sun became an intolerable oppression. Old Ibrahim led, and Carvahal was close beside him. The boy was like a fish in the water, and seemed to treat the whole thing as a joke; yet this was no more than seeming. Even if they reached the dhow safely, they had only knives and cunning to pit against double their number of armed men.

It was wearing on to mid-morning when they ceased swimming, covered themselves amid the floats, and let the strong current drift them down toward where the dhow lay moored beyond the fringing coral under the island's lee. Immersion in the warm water was no hardship, but did not spare them from thirst, and at intervals old Ibrahim cursed steadily. Carvahal mocked him, and the men who heard laughed.

This when they first began to drift, but they fell silent when caution became needful. Thus far they had seen no head above the bows of the dhow. It rose squat before them, like a fat and middle-aged man sitting at ease after a heavy meal. As they drew down and down upon it even Carvahal showed his distrust of this quiet. It was almost past credence that the men aboard her had neglected entirely to keep some sort of lookout in this direction. Sin Tock Lui should be better served than that.

On the other hand, it was obvious that to any man sitting on the dhow's deck that the approach of a schooner or other craft would be clearly visible, and Sin Tock had naught else to fear. Therefore it might well be that the only lookout was in the stern where the deck rose high from the undecked waist, giving them sight of any craft that might be on the horizon. Thence, as Carvahal had pointed out, they would not see any swimmers once these came within a certain angle of blindness, and a few floating branches in the water made a common sight.

So fear was followed by assurance as moment followed moment and the success of their madness became more obvious. Carvahal was the first to arrive, impatience spurring him on. He let go of his screen and seized the anchor line, a heavy hawser, drawn taut by the pull of the tide. Hand over hand, the angle being too acute for swarming. Cautiously yet swiftly the boy jerked himself from the water, Ibrahim following close behind. Save for waistcloths the men were naked, though Carvahal still wore his clean-washed rags. The brown men proved their quality here, for it was no light trick to follow the boy even for this little distance. To pull themselves along and upward on that hawser by sheer arm-muscle bespoke desperate urge, yet they did it. As the weight of one after another came upon the hawser, it dipped a little, so that Carvahal cursed softly at the added exertion. Yet one last effort, and he was at the hawse, and flung himself upward achingly, and his wet shock-head lifted above the rail.

There, a foot distant, back to the bows, sat a smocked Chinaman drowsily nodding over his pipe. He heard the scrape of the boy's body over the rail, or felt it, and half jerked around. Perhaps he felt the knife that plunged past vertebra, through the carotid artery, down for the heart—a driving, deadly blow. Perhaps it reached and stilled his life too soon for any feeling. Carvahal struck as the puff-adder strikes, too swiftly for eye to trace the blow. The man pitched forward on his face, and Carvahal came over the side and stood by him, so that the water dripping from him mingled with the sudden red gush upon the deck.

Aft on the poop, deeply immersed in a tepid argument and concerned only with any craft that might show coming around the island's point, sat the rest of the crew. They knew nothing of the fate of this forward lookout—miscalled thus, else had he not died so swiftly—until a shot from the pistol that the dead man had worn laid one of them low. A second shot brought a squeal from the man whose arm it broke. Carvahal tilted up the smoking muzzle and watched the yellow men pour below and out of sight. Ibrahim, joining him, stormed curses upon him for thus betraying their presence.

"Peace, ancestor of swine!" snapped the boy, whirling on him. "Am I not *rais* until he returns? How should we have crossed there without betraying our presence?" He pointed to the open waist of the dhow. For a matter of twenty feet, until one came the ladder leading to the after-deck, there was no cover even for a rat, since the dhow carried no cargo.

A shot cracked from aft, and one of the Arabs growled. He was unhurt, but a flying splinter had barked his arm. They were all unprotected here, and Carvahal

gained the open hatchway of the forecastle with a leap. A figure showed rushing up from below. He fired—third shot—pistol jammed almost into the man, who fell away and was gone. Carvahal followed down the ladder, the others crowding after him.

They owned half the dhow now. A pistol from the dead man, another from a berth nearby put them in better case. It was Ibrahim who found a jug of water and shared it out, not forgetting Carvahal; the boy refused the jug until they had finished, then drank all that remained.

"No good Christian like me," he said, wiping his lips, "can tell what the religion of a Hazrami will lead him to do if my lips touch the jug before his. Moreover, being all good men, it was certain ye would leave more for me than ye drank for yourselves."

With which the grinning Carvahal flung the jug to smash against the bulkhead, and the Arabs chuckled.

Here were two openings giving view of the waist, and the after-deck showed no sign of life there. They had reached an *impasse;* the first side to attack the other would be a heavy sufferer. At best they had only an hour's time, for it was likely that the shots would carry to Sin Tock, who would return to the dhow with all the speed he could muster. All of them had bolted for cover, and this cover was a trap, just as the after-deck house was a trap for the crew; but Sin Tock's crew could afford to wait, time being all in their favor.

"By Allah and Allah," observed Ibrahim uneasily, "I think we have put our head into a hole!"

VII

ABRUPTLY, unexpectedly there came a whip-like rattle of rifle fire from the stern. In the heavy planking before his eyes, Carvahal suddenly saw four holes splinter and burst. One man flung up his arms with an odd, theatrical gesture and pitched forward on his face, a bullet clean through his heart.

"Down!" cried Ibrahim. "Lie down!"

They lay flat on the floor. Ever and again the bullets phutted through the planking, sending splinters flying or thudded into the filthy berths of the crew behind. The Arab who had been shot lay beside the dead Chinaman; the four sound men lay around, still very hungry but relieved from the tortures of thirst. And as they lay there, little hope was in them, for their pistols were of no avail against rifles, and Sin Tock would be back anon.

"We might have died on Putiala. This den stinks of infidels," growled Ibrahim.

"Only live men smell stinks," retorted Carvahal, and there was a laugh.

In a lull of the firing Carvahal seized the bloody headgear of the man he had killed, and darted for the ladder that led above. He thrust the stained wide hat through the hatchway and a volley rewarded him, followed by spattering shots. He sat on the ladder and grinned impishly, then spat a word at those below.

"To the windows! They must see to shoot—shoot back!"

He had left Ibrahim his pistol. Thus the three men below had one weapon each—heavy Colt automatics, throwing a forty-five bullet with intense muzzle velocity. Ibrahim and the other two cautiously gained their feet, but one sank down again. There were but two windows.

The pistols spoke, spoke again, and fumes rose chokingly. The firing ceased from aft, and a yell arose.

"What now, little *rais?*" demanded Ibrahim, accepting the leadership of the boy.

"Give me a pistol."

It was done, and the men below lay down again at a gesture.

"Now we wait," said Carvahal calmly, "until they use their port-holes again. For that, do you show a sign there. Shove this hat to a window as though eyes were below, and drop it when a shot or two comes."

The trick was ancient, but it worked. Ibrahim caught up a long bamboo pipe from a bunk and placed the hat on it and wobbled this realistically at the lower edge of the port-hole. A bullet smashed through the planking almost at once, a splintered gash which told of a bullet with flattened nose. Ibrahim dropped the cap, then thrust it up again. Two shots this time rewarded his effort. The boy above nodded sagely.

"Good," he said. "Now leave one man to wave the hat thus yet once again. We three others with a pistol each will charge across. First make targets of those who shoot, however. Show the hat at one window, fire from the other. There is room for two at it."

The strategy was good. Once again the hat bobbed, Ibrahim and his fellow taking

post by the other window. Three shots came from aft. They were well answered by a ragged volley from the two Arabs and from Carvahal, who recklessly thrust his head and shoulders out above the deck level.

"Come, Ibrahim!" he yelled shrilly. A leap took him to the deck, the two Arabs charging up the ladder after him.

They crossed the well of the open waist in mad spurt of speed, unhurt. A door was before them entering the after-deck-house, and Ibrahim swung himself through the air at it, smashing it open with a crash. He staggered forward into a welter of humanity over which hung the sickening reek of blood. Carvahal and the other Arab were at his heels.

Here three men lay on the floor, two dead and one whining over a shattered shoulder-joint. Into the five remaining Ibrahim went full tilt with his fellow. Their pistols spat fire, their knives bit. Carvahal, hanging on the outer fringe of the fight, lunged with his knife in the semi-darkness, since he dared not risk shooting.

It was a dim inferno of struggle, amid which raged the powerful figure of Ibrahim. The other Arab coughed and fell over dead, and Carvahal's knife hamstringed his slayer. The other four were upon Ibrahim, twining about him like tangled eels. One man whirled out of that mass, and Carvahal was upon him instantly, a blood-daubed, tiny creature of ferocity, and the keen knife bit at him and drove death into him. The others shrieked and gave way, but Ibrahim struck them down, the pistol gripped for firing, the butt of it hammering them. Now the gaunt Arab stood alone, victor. Panting heavily, he crouched a little and menaced the groaning yellow men with his pistol. Carvahal, likewise nearly exhausted, leaned against the bulkhead and sobbed for breath.

A figure shadowed the doorway behind them.

Neither of them was aware of it. Neither of them perceived the lean, cold face with cruelly slanting eyes, the eyes of a Tartar, not of a Chinaman, that peered in above the muzzle of the leveled pistol. The arm that held the pistol was clad in fine black brocaded silk, for Sin Tock Lui was a man of substance who kept his state at all times.

"Drop your weapons," said Sin Tock calmly, in Swahili.

Carvahal glanced around, a little groan broke from him and he obeyed the order. So did Ibrahim with an oath of consternation.

"I should have come a little sooner," went on Sin Tock. "Now come forth to me, for I may have need of you. It is good to see you again, Carvahal."

Smoothly and silkily spoken, this, as if the man loved them like brothers, yet Carvahal, who feared few things, shivered and moved to obey, as did Ibrahim. They slowly came out from that red shambles, realizing their helplessness and, upon passing the doorway, found Sin Tock's four men there from the whaleboat, with the bound fifth figure—the Arab from the wrecked dhow, whose eyes rolled at sight of Carvahal.

Sin Tock lowered his pistol in apparent carelessness. In his cold eyes was that which held both Ibrahim and Carvahal motionless. Behind him stood his four yellow men, unblinking, nerveless statues, giving in elastic fashion to the slow roll of the dhow on the swell. Now Sin spoke in English. Unlike most of his race, he pronounced it perfectly.

"Little brother, where is Captain Murray?"

Carvahal shook his head.

"He is not here."

"And that is all?" There was a hint of grinding steel in Sin Tock's voice. "As if with my own eyes I could not see that he is absent!" He changed to Swahili and repeated his query. "Where is *Rais* Murray? Speak, brat!"

Carvahal spread out his hands in a gesture of resignation.

"I have said all I know. He slipped cable and went away last night when a French boat gave chase. I know no more."

"So!" Sin Tock nodded slowly. "We shall see about that presently. If he is gone, why is this man with you?"

"We were on the island when he very suddenly left," answered Carvahal without hesitation.

"And the sunken francs?"

For the first time the shadow of a smile played about the thin lips of the yellow man. Carvahal shook his head again.

"Sunken still. *Rais* Murray would have stood round to the south of the island at dawn, when we were to seek them, but the French boat came just after Ibrahim and I had landed to—"

"Is this the truth?" snapped Sin Tock, looking at Ibrahim.

"Verily, it is the truth!" exclaimed the old Arab sonorously. "Think you that one of my respectability and position would lend countenance to lies?"

"Hm!" said Sin Tock, and smiled. His pistol flickered up suddenly, and he spoke to his men. "Take them from behind, and bind them in the usual way, wrist to ankle on either side, while I consider the affair."

RESISTANCE was futile. Sin Tock stood by in apparent indifference while the two were trussed, a hand lashed to an ankle on either side, so that they could neither stand upright nor lie straight. The bound Arab from the wrecked dhow looked on with something like horror in his face. Sin Tock knew nothing of the Arab still in the forecastle, but that man was unarmed save for a knife, and was helpless to take a hand. When the work was done and the two captives squatted with knees near chins before him, he spoke again:

"Boy, this *Rais* Murray will return for you. When?"

"We had no time to say. Perhaps he is captured or sunk," said Carvahal dully.

Sin Tock smiled, a terrible cold smile that told the inherent cruelty of the man.

"So you know nothing, and the francs are still in the wreck?"

"Exactly," said Carvahal.

Sin Tock leaned forward a little, his slant eyes very inhuman.

"I give you one chance to speak, either or both of you," he said. "Tell all you know, or you shall wish you had told."

"By Allah, what is there to tell?" ejaculated Ibrahim indignantly. "You have it all. My *rais* has twenty men aboard. If he were here he would wipe you out swiftly! But he is gone, and the last we saw of him was in shell-fire."

"You lying Arab dog," said Sin Tock calmly, "have I asked you to spout words in place of truth?"

Ibrahim spat, and the spittle splashed on the black robe of Sin Tock. One of the men took his own sleeve and wiped the brocaded silk, then Sin Tock gestured toward the mast.

"Two pulleys," he said briefly.

The yellow men sprang to obey. They ran up two blocks and sheaves, through which stout lines were rove, to the masthead. The end of one line they tied to the lashing that joined Carvahal's right wrist to his right ankle. With the other, they did the same to Ibrahim.

"Up," said Sin Tock. "Six feet up. Not too high. Right."

In the space of seconds the two hung there, living pendulums, above the well of the dhow, each by an arm and wrist. By constricting the muscles it was possible to evade the pain for a moment or two, but it would speedily grow to agony insupportable.

"Make fast," said Sin Tock.

The ropes were given a couple of turns and made fast.

Carvahal and Ibrahim twirled slowly as they swung in air, and the boy bit at his lips to keep back his cries. Ibrahim swung, impassive as a wooden image, stone-faced, as if not feeling the cut of the thongs on his bare flesh, the knife-like grip against which the line pulled. It was a torture which racked ankle and wrist, shoulder and knee and thigh, and presently spread to the contorted body muscles, so that all their bodies leaped into a whirl of throbbing, infernal agony. A grunt came from Ibrahim.

"*Rais*—a man—for endurance!"

"Allah be with thee," returned Carvahal, white-faced.

From below came the soft laugh of Sin Tock and his coldly impassive voice.

"Neither Allah nor Christ nor Buddha," he said, "but Sin Tock Lui, waiting till one or other speak. Hang thus till a tongue loosens or until both tongues rot!"

Carvahal clenched his teeth. Presently a slow twirl of the line brought him full above the yellow man. He spat, unexpectedly, and hit his mark. The yellow face contracted in a snarl of sudden fury.

"Lower him," he ordered his men. "Carve deep crosses on the soles of his feet—double crosses—and then bring salt."

A shrill yell intervened. The men whirled. Sin Tock turned to look, and Carvahal twisted his head about to follow their gaze. There at the eastern point of the island, close by, showed the sprit of a schooner. She bore on into full sight under a good head of sail, and from the tortured Carvahal burst a cry of joy.

"Rifles!" leaped the voice of Sin Tock.

There was Murray at the schooner's helm and half a dozen figures spotting the rail.

The yellow men were running for the stern, thrusting up their rifles, and the first crack sounded. Those aboard the schooner dropped from sight, even Murray. Sin Tock darted into the stern cabins of the dhow and emerged with a rifle for himself. By this time the schooner was driving dead upon them, wheel lashed, never a man in sight.

At this the Chinamen seemed momentarily to lose their heads until the voice of Sin Tock rallied them. Hard and harsh rang out the commands in his own tongue; his men lined the after-port rail, waiting the approach of the schooner as she stood in for them. Murray had no small boat left, and it was obvious that he must put his schooner alongside the dhow if he would board her.

Sin Tock was ready for him. From their points of cover along the rail five men waited with rifles ready. Two more men came crawling dazedly forth from the stern deck-house. The bound Arab was sitting philosophically in the waist. Overhead the two tortured bodies lazily twirled in the sunlight, heads hanging, teeth bitten on lower lips to keep back the cries.

Then suddenly from somewhere aboard the schooner rang out a shot. Carvahal uttered a cry of wild fright, feeling himself plunging through space. That shot had cut the line upholding him. His cry was drowned in another. He tumbled, a heap of pain, upon the squatting bound Arab from the wrecked dhow. Still bound and helpless, the boy lay there recovering from his torture, and dimly heard two more shots ring out, then a third. The body of Ibrahim came rushing down and struck heavily upon the bare planking.

"This is no time to knock a hole in the bottom," gasped Carvahal.

Ibrahim, when the breath came back to him, consigned the boy's tongue to a place both hot and foul. He wriggled himself close to the boy. They could see nothing, being in the waist, but heard shots spattering out. The fingers of Ibrahim touched upon the wrists of Carvahal, and at this moment the dhow shook with a thudding crash; they could see the canvas of the schooner towering overhead, the schooner's rail alongside. A second crash of splintering wood. Way checked by the long cable of the dhow, the schooner drove into her without great damage, her sharp bowsprit fouling the rigging above.

Murray led the rush aboard, four men at his heels. From Sin Tock came a weird fighting cry as if this sort of work were to his taste, loosing in him a berserk Tartar strain. It was man to man, and the Soronho diamonds to the winner. And while the shots rang, the fingers of Ibrahim fumbled at the cords binding Carvahal.

VIII

IN THE wild fight raging along the dhow's after-deck came one tremendous instant when Sin Tock Lui came face to face with Murray and lifted his pistol, pulling the trigger point-blank. The miracle of a hundredth chance saved Murray, for the automatic jammed. With a curse the yellow man hurled his weapon. It caught Murray's shoulder as he dodged. His foot slipped. The lean Chinaman was upon him instantly, hands at throat, murder lust in those slant eyes.

As for the others, it was man to man, dodging and shooting from any cover that came to hand or coming to grips in wild frenzy. Two of them locked, brown and yellow man arm in arm, rolling frantically about the deck, snarling and worrying like two dogs until they came to the ladder leading to the waist and plunged headlong over the edge. At its foot they struck and lay still. The Chinaman had bitten the Arab clean through the jugular vein, only to have his own neck broken by the impact of the fall. And there was an Arab who leaned against the splintered rail and laughed to see his opponent pinned to the deck by a long knife through his body—until presently that Arab sank quietly down, his shoulder long since broken by a flat-nosed rifle bullet, and the blood draining out of him.

Carvahal saw a queer thing in these two or three minutes, which seemed as an eternity. A Chinaman went leaping over the rail, and after him an Arab, plunging into the sea. Presently that Arab came up alone and clambered aboard again by the anchor cable forward and ran aft, too mad with lust for battle to heed the yell of Ibrahim. As the Arab leaped back to the after-deck, a yellow man thrust a rifle in his face and pulled trigger, only to lose balance and fall with him, scrambling. Aft came running the man whom Ibrahim had left in

the forward cabin, and leaped upon the Chinaman with his knife.

All this while Sin Tock and Murray fought in the way of primitive men, rending, rolling across the deck, gouging at eyes and snapping at bared flesh—a gory, maddened pair, evenly matched until Murray's weakened condition betrayed him. Then Sin Tock came above and took Murray by the throat, so that the white face purpled and blackened, and Murray's arms fell limp to the deck. Sin Tock emitted a thin, gasping laugh that sounded like silk tearing asunder.

On that laugh a shape flashed forward. Carvahal, loosened at last, without weapon, picked up a smashed rifle as he came. He hurled himself through the air, and the iron smote across the head of Sin Tock, so that even while laughing, the yellow man bowed sidewise and fell senseless. A glance around showed the game won, and Carvahal sped back to Ibrahim with a knife picked from the deck.

"I dared not wait, son of Eblis," he panted as he hacked the old Arab free. "Sin Tock is a ——, and had *Rais* Murray down."

Ibrahim stood up, groaning.

"Thou art no less a ——," he said, stretching his pained and twisted limbs. "Yet at times a good ——."

Carvahal was already darting back to the after-deck, and the Arab followed him, taking stock while the boy knelt above Murray. There was one Arab with a smashed shoulder still alive; two sound men remaining had gone hastily aboard the schooner as the latter fell away from the dhow and paid off in the wind. They were bringing her around again.

Murray's eyes opened and he smiled up into the impish face above him.

"We won?" he asked.

Carvahal aided him to sit up.

"Yes." There were tears in the boy's eyes as he saw that Murray was in bad shape. "It was your rifle that cut my rope, *rais*. I am your slave for that shot."

"No," said Murray. "My son, Carvahal, if you'll have it so. Between us we'll make a man of you."

"With my francs, eh?" Carvahal laughed a little.

"Our francs," corrected Murray gravely. "And our diamonds, son."

Presently Murray sat with his back against the rail, while Carvahal washed and bandaged him. Ibrahim had already trussed up Sin Tock Lui and made sure there were no Chinamen left alive here, and now came up to report. The schooner was drifting alongside, her canvas slack, and Carvahal ran to catch a thrown line.

"Three of us left, *rais*," said Ibrahim. "We are short-handed."

"The monsoon blows," said Murray weakly. "No matter."

"What course shall we set?"

"Nossi Bé."

"By Allah!" exclaimed the Arab in wonder. "Into the very heart of French power?"

"Aye. Only the gunboat is after us. The chances are even there's no general alarm. We can pick up men at Hellville easily enough, Arabs or Malagasies."

"That mate of yours is a good *rais*," said Ibrahim with a grin.

Murray glanced at the figure of Carvahal and his eyes warmed.

The schooner was alongside, and the two sound men came to the after-deck of the dhow. Murray lifted himself to his feet, though the effort cost him dear. He staggered and gripped the rail to steady himself.

"To Nossi Bé, Ibrahim—Carvahal!" he exclaimed. "Set the course. Get out of here before that gunboat returns! I'll fix up the papers—ah—that —— there—"

He pointed at the bound figure of Sin Tock Lui, then quietly toppled over in a dead faint. Ibrahim caught him.

"Carry him aboard, put him in his berth," said Carvahal. "He was not fit to fight. He will be around by morning. Quickly, now! We have work to do."

He searched Murray's figure, found some cigarets and lighted one. The three Arabs carried Murray aboard the schooner, then returned and helped their wounded comrade over the rails. They came back to the boy, who gave them swift orders, pointing to the boat near-by.

"Lower this boat, go get those canvas bags of mine and come back quickly!"

The three men fell to work. They got the boat in the water, dropped into her and laid over the oars with a will. Carvahal sat down and smoked out his cigaret, and met the glittering eyes of the trussed Sin Tock. He tossed away his cigaret and thumbed his knife, which he had retrieved, and stood above the yellow man.

"Spawn of ——, dost thou remember a

woman of the Swahili who died, a woman who was kind to me?" he asked reflectively. Then his voice changed. "Remember sitting beside her and watching her die from thy poisons, eh? *And Muhammad the fisherman*, that good man! Remember how he was bound at thy order? Remember how thy knife drove through him slowly—so slowly—five times, the vital thrust last of the five? Remember these things. Two things alone out of many. Think about them, Sin Tock Lui."

Sin Tock closed his eyes for an instant to escape the gleam shining in the boy's face, and Carvahal, leaning over, spat on him.

"Open and look!" he said, and lightly drew his knife across the yellow throat, not deep enough to kill, but stingingly.

Up in the stern of the dhow sat a joss, a grinning thing which meant much to the yellow folk. Carvahal went to it, spat upon it as he had spat upon its owner, then wrested it from its fixed place and rolled it to the edge of the deck. With a heave he lifted it over the rail. Sin Tock Lui, who had hitherto uttered no sound, groaned a little.

"It bites like a knife-point, eh?" Carvahal laughed gleefully. "It bites, thief and killer of men! Poisoner! Yet there is more to come. Think upon that Swahili woman."

"Ibrahim! To me. You others, make ready to cast off."

"Now, little *rais?*" The old Arab licked his lips. "Do we loot?"

Carvahal hesitated, then shook his head.

"We are not petty thieves. Carry this man back to the mast. How deep is the water here?"

"Six fathoms, *rais*."

Carvahal nodded as though satisfied.

Ibrahim stopped, lifted the trussed body of Sin Tock Lui, and carried the latter to the foot of the foremast in the waist. Carvahal joined him, leisurely enough, and then spoke a low word in his ear. The Arab's eyes glinted.

"By Allah, that is good! Though I think *Rais* Murray will not be pleased."

"Are you obeying me or not?"

"You, little *rais*."

Ibrahim drove anew the broken line through the sheaf above. Then, coming to Sin Tock, he loosened one hand and ankle from the bonds, and trussed them together. The beady, glittering slant eyes went from Carvahal to the Arab, but Sin Tock uttered no word. Ibrahim made fast the rope from above to the lashings and stood up.

"Now is the time to think," said Carvahal, looking down steadily into those hate-filled eyes. "You have many things to think about, but chiefly let your thoughts dwell upon that woman of the Swahili. Up, Ibrahim! Then get aboard the schooner."

So saying, the boy turned. He did not look back, but went below into the stern quarters of the dhow, and was there for a matter of minutes, lost to sight.

When he emerged, he looked upward. A figure swung there halfway up the mast, a twirling pendulum between sea and sky. Carvahal saw, as it swung, the contorted yellow face of Sin Tock glaring down at him, and he laughed a little.

"Think well!" he said. "This is not for myself alone, yellow ——, but chiefly for that woman who was kind to me and whom you poisoned. Remember her!"

A sound came down to him, a thin, shrill sound that might have been a repressed groan.

A moment later Carvahal vaulted to the deck of the schooner and nodded to the man who stood at the line. It was cast off. The canvas, bellying in the breeze, thrust the schooner away, and she leaned over to it. Carvahal went to the helm where stood Ibrahim.

"He gave you a course?" asked Carvahal.

"He did, *rais*."

"Then keep it until I return, when I will take the deck," said the boy.

"Where go you, *rais?*"

Carvahal met the old, shrewd eyes and smiled thinly.

"I go to tell my father that Sin Tock is dead, but I shall not mention the manner of the death. Eh?"

"I advise you not to," said the Arab grimly.

Carvahal nodded, and vanished below.

The schooner drew away. Five minutes afterward one of the men uttered a cry and pointed. Ibrahim, standing at the helm, turned and looked over his shoulder at the dhow, where a speck twirled at the mast. It was not at this speck he looked, however, but at a streamer of smoke that began to arise from the after cabins of the dhow, and slowly became blacker and more thick. Admiration leaped into the eyes of the Arab.

"By the ineffable names of Allah!" he exclaimed approvingly. "I could love that boy! Aye, even as my own son."

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

IN ANNOUNCING our magazine's change from three issues a month to two I spoke of the many readers who had told us that, while they still liked *Adventure*, the time at their disposal was not sufficient to keep up with one issue every ten days. There were many of them and of course there were many others who had to give up the magazine for the same reason but did not write to us about it. The following letter to our Circulation Department from the vice-president of The American Trust Company, Richmond, Virginia, states the general case with a good deal of exactness:

Richmond, Virginia.

I am returning you, herewith, subscription blank for *Adventure*, as I have determined not to renew it this year. I have taken this magazine for quite a number of years and have always thoroughly enjoyed it. The only reason I have for stopping is that, as they are issued three times a month, I do not have time to do any other reading, and I must confess that as long as they come I will give them the preference, and the only way that I can see my way clear to do a lot of reading which I should do is to put temptation out of the way by stopping my subscription. This is quite a hard thing for me to do, and I may break my resolution before the end of the year is up.

Thanking you, and wishing you great success for the best magazine of its kind on the market, I remain, Yours very truly.—G. A. PEPLE.

The situation had to be met. Everywhere was friendliness and liking for the magazine but there were too many friends and readers who were unable to keep up with thirty-six issues a year. So here we are back on our old basis of twice a month.

But with a difference. The period of three

issues a month built up an incoming supply of good fiction greater than we had ever had before. Now, from three issues at quality par, we have returned to two issues. Unavoidably that means a great advance in quality. For a time our magazine will run on just as before, but gradually, as material now on hand goes into print and the results of a more exacting selection begin to show, our magazine—well, let's wait and let it speak for itself.

THE following letter can be characterized as the voice of a good sportsman speaking for good sportsmanship. If every man behind a gun, or behind a bow and arrow, were animated by the same spirit we should not need to worry much over conservation of game.

The letter answers one of our archer comrades and lambasts me—more or less for views I do not hold, but what it does to me is a minor matter and I commend it very heartily.

South Orange, New Jersey.

I haven't missed reading every issue of *Adventure* for a number of years, and sometimes it is pretty much of a temptation to rise up in Camp-Fire and say my say. When it comes to shooting with a shotgun, or rather when it comes to having some one say that shooting with a murderous shotgun has taken the sportsmanship out of hunting and left it mere butchery, I simply can't sit by and let him get away with it.

I BELIEVE that I have a right to speak on the subject, and if I weren't afraid of being a bore I'd be willing to establish that right in Camp-Fire. Suffice it to say that for twenty-two years I have been shooting a shotgun at feathered game.

First of all, I am willing to concede that I have absolutely no sympathy with pump-guns or automatic shotguns, and I am proud to say that in my State it is against the law to hunt with a shotgun which will hold more than two shells. Secondly, at least fifty per cent of the sport of hunting upland game birds consists in hunting them over a bird dog. In other words I have scant respect for the man who sallies forth with an automatic gun and no dog, and who claims to be a sportsman. That remark will cause a stink in many circles, but let it stand as my opinion.

THE game which I love to hunt most is the ruffed grouse—not in its simple-minded state as found in the far north, but as the wildest, quickest, cleverest game bird in the world, bar none, as it is in lower New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Let me give any of you who have never hunted this bird, under the conditions in which I find it, a little idea of what a day's grouse hunt means. We start early in the morning, over mountains carpeted with laurel, down into thick rhododendron swamps, over some more mountains, along rocky ledges, and down into alder swamps. By noon I have seen a strong man unused to this form of exercise faint from exhaustion. After lunch we cover more of the same kind of ground. On a day when we have flushed thirty grouse, we feel that we have flushed a lot. I didn't say *seen* thirty grouse, because we may only see half of the birds that flush in the thick cover. The most birds I ever shot in one day is three. Query: how many would our archer friends have shot? I have had to carry a setter home over a couple of mountains because he went lame and couldn't get home himself. I have had to quit cold myself by three in the afternoon because I couldn't go another step. In other words if a few of these archers will accompany me on a day's grouse shooting, I believe they will concede that there is some sportsmanship connected with the game, whether we carry shotguns or bows.

THE average shot at a grouse must be made within two to three seconds of the time he flushes from the ground, else he will be out of sight. His first move is to put a tree between himself and the hunter. He usually is flushed in thick cover—second growth, cedars, pines, rhododendrons, etc.—and many, many times the hunter never does get a shot at a bird that may have flushed within thirty feet of him. I have often killed a bird after he has passed from view. And here is where I feel that a dog is absolutely necessary: those birds would never have been found without the dog's nose, would have probably died or been killed by vermin. So I have excellent reason to say that the man who shoots without a bird dog is not my idea of a sportsman.

Although I have never witnessed any good archery, I have very serious doubts as to the ability of the best archer in the world to kill grouse on the wing. In many years of hunting I have seldom seen the birds on the ground. Fairly often they are seen in trees; but knocking a sitting bird off a branch with a bow and arrow is a long way from being sport compared to shooting at the bird on the wing.

NOW for a few other game birds: woodcock would hardly be a practical bird for the archer to shoot, for he is flushed most often in cover so thick that it is next to impossible to raise a gun—let alone a bow and arrow. Only once have I seen a woodcock on the ground without a dog pointing him for me. If you shoot woodcock on the ground a few feet from a dog's nose with a gun or a bow or anything else, you are a low skunk. The same goes for quail or any other bird with the possible exception of a turkey. Any one who can kill quail on the wing with a bow deserves a lot of credit. Possibly one could hit a pheasant on the wing with an arrow. These two birds are easy to hunt as far as the traveling is concerned; but the woodcock is found in very difficult cover—swamps and thickets of birch and alder.

WILDFOWL could be hit on the water with an arrow, I suppose, but I don't see that shooting them on the wing with a double barreled shotgun is exterminating them. As a matter of fact wildfowl are on the increase along the Atlantic seaboard, largely due to the Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada and Federal control of seasons. They'd be on the increase further west if it weren't for the destruction of their feeding grounds by drainage

operations, etc. In my part of the country, which is shot over about as much as any place in the world, due to the nearness of several huge cities, woodcock are holding their own, grouse are increasing, pheasants are increasing, what quail there are here in the summer migrate in the fall (yes they do, old timers!), wildfowl are increasing—all in spite of an army of hunters.

I'd like to take up this bow and arrow business myself; it sounds interesting. But as for shooting upland game birds with them—me for a shotgun, with a good dog.

JUST a word about the editor's remarks on fishing, comparing the killing of fish with the killing of birds. They can't be compared for several reasons. The biggest one is that the easiest thing in the world to do is to restock waters with artificially hatched fish; while the hardest thing I can imagine would be to restock covers with woodcock or grouse. With pheasants, yes; with quail, I doubt it. So, rules that go for fishing don't go for shooting. A sportsman *must* follow a strict set of rules when he hunts birds; he can't follow his inclinations at all times, for the results might be too serious.

I believe an angler (using legitimate tackle) can catch fish on anything he wants to use, from plugs to worms to flies without committing an irreparable mistake. He can be a hog—if he finds that a worthy ambition—and still we can restock the ponds and streams next year if we have the money to pay for raising the fish required. I judge a fisherman to a great extent by the tackle he uses, putting the fly fisherman first, for there is no doubt of the fact that he's out for sport. Incidentally if he knows his business he is a man who has worked hard at his sport, because it takes years to make an accomplished fly fisherman. Going after fish with plugs and triple hooks, as our editor confesses he does, is most certainly not on a par with using a modern, highly developed (which I take it means automatic) shotgun on quail. It is so much easier to rectify the damage done by the plugs. However, if ye editor wants a real kick let him try fly fishing for trout. I'll take him out any week-end during the spring and show him all the trout he wants.

If I thought a moderate increase of birds would compensate us for the lack of what shooting now gives us, I'd say stop shooting. There would only be a moderate increase in birds if we did stop. Old Mother Nature hasn't given up her job, and when the sportsman laid off the vermin, as well as the birds, many an egg wouldn't produce any more than a meal for said vermin. Also, in the case of the grouse, Old Dispharagus would soon get on the job worse than he is now, and grouse would decrease rather than increase. Dispharagus is the name of a germ that kills more grouse every year than guns do. When the birds get overplentiful in any cover the germ is spread rapidly until by the next year there are mighty few birds left.

I TELL you, brothers of the Camp-Fire, a man has absolutely no right to shoot his face off about conservation until he has spent a good many years studying the hundreds of phases of it. A few enthusiastic ignoramuses can raise more —— with fish and game than a big number of decent hunters. Don't forget that. And it is most often the ignoramus that does make the loudest noise. That's one reason I have learned to keep still when the Camp-Fire resounds with arguments of fellows who know their stuff on lots of subjects that are practically unknown to me. That Julius Cæsar row almost got a rise out of me; but what the deuce do I know about Cæsar in spite of a certain parchment roll with a lot of Latin on it, which rests comfortably in the garret? Every time I read about the D. F. anti-weapon law I want to horn in; but I need more study before I do.

I therefore propose that brothers of the Camp-Fire who only possess a little knowledge of a subject, keep back in the shadows and listen to the fellows who have a lot of knowledge of that subject. On the other hand I suggest that the fellows who have a lot of knowledge on a subject come across with it freely, so that the rest of us will have something worth listening to as we sit in the shadows.

I REALIZE that the above implies that I have a lot of knowledge on the shooting and conservation subject. Well, I have enough to license me to shuffle out of the shadows for a few minutes at any rate. For instance I know that the man who abides by the laws of his State and acts like a gentleman in the field with his shotgun and dog is not a murderer. I know that he is willing—and actually does—feed the game birds in his section when the snow is deep, which is more than a lot of mealy-mouthed reformers do. I know that he will work just as hard to kill vermin as he will to kill game—which is something else the hot-air artists don't bother with. I know that the best thing that the American man can do is to put himself over the same jumps (referring to mountains and swamps) that the hunter does, which would kill the average mush-bag who howls against shooting. I am not referring to the archers, who may be just as fine sportsmen as any one who shoots a gun; I am referring to the kind of mutt that wants to stop every activity of an outdoor man that doesn't happen to meet with his own personal approval, and there are a lot of these mutts.

SOME years ago I wrote an article in the New York *Sun* describing a real sportsman, and in it I said that it takes time and hard work to produce a *real sportsman*. Any fellow who has decent instincts and who can shoot well or fish well is by no means through with his education. He must know the life history of the game he's after, he must be willing to take care of that game, he should thoroughly understand the weapon or tackle he is using. I never have known a real sportsman who has been at the game for less that five or six years, and usually it takes nearer ten years to turn one out. Therefore, don't use the term sportsman indiscriminately. Let it mean something—an honorable title acquired only by hard application to the subject. Personally, I'd rather be known as an American Sportsman than as Senator; there is more real work required—if less money—in acquiring the title.

I trust that you will forgive me for taking so much of your time, if you've bothered to read all this.—EUGENE V. CONNETT 3rd.

Mr. Connett's little cracks at me fail to arouse any ire and, I'm sure, were not meant to, but I'm not willing to stand before Camp-Fire with quite the brand he puts on

me. He seems to think I spoke in the interests of game conservation. I'm strongly for sane conservation, but in this instance I wasn't even thinking about it, still less "shooting off my face about it." Nor did I attack the shooting of game with guns. Merely said it didn't appeal to me personally, this killing of harmless creatures by means of civilization's inventions. Took pains to say that, judged by exactly the same standards, I was in exactly the same boat with those who do thus kill them, since I kill fish with plugs and gladly eat, when I get the chance, the birds my friends kill with guns. Stated I didn't pretend to any superiority of ethics or anything else.

If any one got the idea I was crusading against legitimate, sportsmanlike hunting, he'd better put that idea back wherever he drew it from. There are about ten thousand other things that need abolishing before any crack-pate starts in abolishing hunting, and if our younger generation would give up many of their present pursuits and take up this kind of sportsmanship in the outdoors I'd help lead the cheering. Many of my friends hunt. Their attitude is sincere and I respect it. It happens that I don't like to kill harmless living creatures. My attitude is sincere and I expect my friends to respect it. (That is, if I quit killing fish and thus make really good on said attitude!)

Since Mr. Connett agrees that it would be far harder to kill game with arrows instead of bullets, he bears out the only point I made by way of comparison of the two methods.

I'M AFRAID he has a rather low opinion of me all around and gives me less chance than he gives a bird. He even suggests that I "try fly-fishing for trout," as if it would be an entirely new experience for me. I'm no expert by any means but I live on a trout stream about as far from New York as he does and any time he'd like to try that stream I'll be glad to lend him my fly-rod.

Killing fish and killing birds can't be compared? Oh yes, they can. On the basis of killing harmless creatures they can, which was the only basis from which I spoke.

None of which prevents my wishing that every one put behind his gun as much real sportsmanship as Mr. Connett evidently does.

OWING to a mistake in make-up made in our office, the following, which should have appeared in the last issue as a Foreword to the complete novelette, "Christ in Chicago," by T. S. Stribling, was not placed where it belonged and is given here. Needless to say we make our apologies, both to you and to Mr. Stribling, for the omission and express our very sincere regrets.

Foreword

The author would be loath to think this story a probability or even a possibility. However, it was suggested by the minutes of the proceedings of the American Association of Progressive Medicine held in Chicago some years ago. In developing in fictional form the implications of these minutes, the writer has frankly abandoned any realistic treatment for fantasy.

While the time of the story is laid some fifty or sixty years in the future, for the sake of simplicity no reference is made to the many new mechanical inventions which undoubtedly will be in use at that time. The narrative itself deals with a theme which the author feels lies beneath the accidents of that mysterious changing flux which men have agreed to call Time.

Finally the writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of one who helped him in the construction of the plot of this story, and he ventures to dedicate the work itself to

MR. TRAVIS HOKE
in memory of our Chicago days.

Gloucester, Mass. T. S. S.
June 1925.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any qualified person can start a Station.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

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A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its

possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

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322—New Pomona. Ed. N. Clark. Putnam District Progress.

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131—Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsythia, R. F. D. No. 3.
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192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.

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275—Camden. Captain Herbert George Sparrow, Ship No. 1269 Naval Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Armory of Second Battalion, Naval Militia of New Jersey, Temple Theater Building, 415 Market St.
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281—Warm Beach. Paul E. Vollum and Kirkham Evans, Evans Bldg.

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282—Ryricton, Victoria. Thomas T. Winter, care of Post Office.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
235—Sydney. Phillip Norman, 842 Military Road, Nosman, Sydney.
278—Belgrave, Victoria. Raymond Paule, Carn Bre, Old Monbulk Road.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.

Canada—31—Howe Sound, B. C. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Ontario. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly*.
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30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, The Carleton Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue.
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300—Halifax, N. S. Audler S. Lee, 551 Gottingen St.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.

China—222—Tientsin. Dr. George W. Twomey, 43 Rue de Amiraute.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominquez, 7 Cerro.

Egypt—173—Khartoum, Sudany. W. T. Moffat, Sudan Customs.

England—296—Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. William Berry, 19 Weston Place, off Heathcote Road.

Germany—283—Dusseldorf. Hans Derrick Hulsmann, care R. A. Visser & Co.

Guatemala—315—Puerto Barrios. John R. Strange, United Fruit Co.

Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.
272—Honolulu, Hawaii. Hubert T. Miller, Room 4, Silent Hotel.

Honduras, C. A.—70—La Ceiba. Jos. Buckly Taylor.

India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona*. Elmer E. McLean.

Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.

Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.

Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

Virgin Islands—301—St. Thomas. Joseph Reynolds, The Grand Hotel.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
14—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—35. Europe. In Seven Parts
36—38. South America. In Three Parts
39. Central America
40—42. Mexico. In Three Parts
43—51. Canada. In Nine Parts
52. Alaska
53. Baffinland and Greenland
54—59. Western U. S. In Six Parts
60—64. Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
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A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
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D 1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O, P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

Muskrat Farming

BETTER, perhaps, than raising foxes.

Request:—"In a recent issue I read an article written by you on fox farming. Wondering if you could give me some information on muskrat farming I am taking the liberty to ask you a few questions. Any information other than the following questions regarding muskrat farming will be greatly appreciated.

1. Will muskrats migrate from one lake to another, even though feed may be plentiful but quarters crowded?

2. Do muskrats mate the same as fox, or does one male take say six females?

3. About how large and how many litters does a pair have during a year?

4. Would the rats do better if left to provide their food and dens or should artificial dens be erected?

5. How large a marsh would be necessary to raise say three or four thousand rats a year?

6. If it is necessary to fence the marsh or lake how deep should the wire be set into the ground and about how far back from the edge of the water?

7. Do you know of any way to trap rats alive other than the steel trap, so's not to break the leg?

8. I understand the farm bred muskrat will not bring as high a price as the wild muskrat; is this true?

9. What State would you suggest as the best in the Northwest to raise muskrats?

10. Would an artificial lake be all right or would the natural marsh be better?

11. Do you suppose that the rats would get tamed enough so that they could be handled without fear of being bitten by them?

It would be a shame and at the same time a loss of money to trap the kits and all of the females unless some way were provided that the rats could be sorted out and those saved that were wanted for breeding purposes. How could this be done?

You can see from the above questions that I sure don't know my oats when it comes to raising muskrats, but I've had the bug in my head for a long time and next spring I intend to start operations and either raise muskrats or agree with the most of my friends and say it can't be done.

I'm sorry if I have put you to a lot of trouble with my questions and you may be assured your answer will be highly appreciated."—P. H. CLARK, Casper, Wyo.

Reply, by Mr. Bowden:—Personally I have always favored muskrats, over black foxes, because they are a lot less work, and are more hardy, and they multiply about four or five times faster than the foxes. They are a lot easier to feed, and they will more than half feed themselves if given half a chance, and be a lot better for the foraging they do for themselves.

Your questions follow in order:

1. They certainly will go from one place to another, especially at certain times of the year. Don't think for the minute that you can place the rats in a pond or a brook and have them stay there, without anything to hold them for you can't do it. The muskrat is a liberty loving animal, and taken by and large is quite sagacious, so be sure of your fences before placing your stock on your proposed farm. THIS IS IMPORTANT.

2. They do not mate the same as foxes. You should have about one male to eight or ten females, not any more bucks (males) than this I should say, and they might do better with even more females and fewer males. During the mating season if there are too many males the whole place will be in an uproar with the males fighting all the time, all of which excites all of the other members of the population, and is bad from the breeder's standpoint.

3. In good surroundings, with proper care, a healthy doe should produce from two to three litters of from six to nine young rats each, so you see they do multiply very fast.

4. They would do a lot better if left to provide their own dens. With foxes you can't do this as a fox is so abominably dirty that the dens must be arranged so that they can be cleaned of vermin; but the muskrat is a very clean housekeeper as animals go, and because he spends so much of his life in the water, vermin does not seem to thrive on him as it does on foxes. The muskrat as you know builds a house which resembles the well known beaver house for his winter quarters, in the summer he lives largely in burrows, in the bank of the pond or stream, where he had his home.

5. To raise three or four thousand muskrats yearly you should have a pond of not less than six or seven acres I should say, but try it out in a smaller way at first, and within a short time you could readily see how much space this number of rats would need. If there are too many in a small space they are apt to fight more or less, all of which is bad for the pelts, which is what you are most interested in.

6. You bet your life it is necessary to fence the pond. Make your fence like the enclosed drawing with the APRON to prevent the rats from climbing up the fence and over. Wire should be set into the ground about three and one-half feet to discourage digging, because Mr. Muskrat is quite some busy little excavator when he puts his mind to it. Fence should be about four feet high. You should set your fence ten or twelve feet from the edge of the pond or bog, then the rats will have some dry ground, which they will use a lot, you will have a place to walk to look over your domain. You will use it a lot, and it will be a lot easier to place the fence away from the water. At one end of your farm have an enclosure where you can spread food, and for your storage buildings for tools and such; place food in this part of the farm every day, and it is surprising how quickly the rats will come there looking for it.

7. You might try the old-fashioned box trap; you know, the same as we used to use for rabbits. If you are in a locality where there are lots of rats, and where they are not trapped to death it might work. The muskrat is kind of a trustful sort of a cuss, and maybe you could get a few this way.

8. I think this is the bunk, or in other words propaganda spread by the trappers, to discourage fur farming. For if all of the fur used was farm-raised, what would happen to the fur trappers' trade? Given the proper kind of a pond, the right kind of climate (cold), lots of good food, does it sound reasonable to believe that the muskrat living under these conditions would suddenly start growing a different kind of a pelt? Tommyrot.

9. I am not very familiar with that part of the world. Offhand should say that one of the Border

States to Canada. You understand of course that to raise good fur you must have cold weather. New Brunswick in Canada is an ideal place for muskrat farming, lots of small ponds and bogs, and lots of cold weather, and the rats of that part raise a pelt that is a beautiful golden brown. The beauty of muskrat farming is, that you use something that no one else wants, and that would be of no possible use for anything else in the world.

10. By all means use a natural lake if possible, as muskrats are largely root feeders, and live a lot on water plants, and you would not have these in an artificial lake or pond at first anyway.

11. I don't think you would ever get them tame enough so that you would be able to handle them without danger of getting bitten, and they are some biters, as several scars I have from my trapping days as a kid will testify. You can, however, by not moving quickly, and by being very gentle and quiet when near them, soon accustom the rats to seeing you around, and soon they will come up to the feeding ground whenever they see you. Have a pen near the feeding ground where you can drive the rats at pelting time and sort them, pelting mostly males, of course.

As you become accustomed to handling the rats, ways of actually handling them for sorting and pelting will readily suggest themselves to you. I could not give any set way to handle the situation until I saw the layout of your farm pen and pond, but I'm sure this end of the business need give you no worry.

Good luck if you start. Common sense is all that is needed, and I know several men who are making mighty good money raising rats. Of all the fur-bearers, as I said before, the muskrat is my favorite, and good muskrat pelts are just the same as money in the bank.

Here's a tip for you I just learned today. The Australian government has placed an embargo on all furs from that country, that means there will be no more black opossum, no more wambat, kangaroo, or wallaby skins from there coming into this market for a while at least, and of course all of our native furs should be higher in consequence; surely not any lower.

Anything else you wish to know I will be only too pleased to answer if I am able. Once more, good luck.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Connecticut

ONE does not usually associate the State with tobacco growing.

Request:—"I am thinking of investing in a tobacco farm in Connecticut—have no experience in farming of any kind—so would be glad to have all the general information possible—for example:

1. What are the best tobacco-growing districts in Connecticut?

2. What is the average price of good tobacco land per acre?

3. What are the average profits per acre on tobacco?

4. To what State department ought I to apply for books or pamphlets on tobacco culture, etc?"—MAURICE DE CASTELBLED, New York City.

Reply, by Mr. Voight:—Please accept my apologies for the long delay in answering your letter, as I have been very much under the weather.

The best tobacco-growing district in Connecticut is the land starting at Glastonbury on the Connecticut River and running up to Springfield in Massachusetts.

The strip is about fifteen miles on either side of the river. The price of land varies so much that it would be impossible to give you an average figure as to that or the profits.

If you will write to the State Agricultural Department at the Capitol in Hartford, they will forward you complete information.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

British Guiana

RUMORS of diamonds.

Request:—"From time to time I have heard stories of a diamond strike in the interior of British Guiana. Also that the main difficulty lies in the inaccessibility of the region.

Granting that one could reach the section and get out again, in your opinion, would the trip be worth while? Where are the grounds? Is there any official red tape for the prospector to go through?

If you should use this in *Adventure*, kindly do not print my name. A stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed." ——, Baltimore, Md.

Reply, by Mr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—You are not the only one who has heard of a diamond strike in British Guiana. I am glad that you put your question to me as you have, and my emphatic answer is no.

There is too much against the American or any outsider in Guiana: The climate, the inaccessibility of the diamond and gold fields, the character of the population, the character of the competitors on the ground and the extreme doubtfulness of success after you have gone there and have adjusted yourself to the social conditions as well as to the climate.

The British Government is preparing a report on this question, but it has not appeared as yet. My latest information from Guiana has indicated that there is not much truth to this diamond rush and therefore my advice is not to pay much attention to it.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.

SOME day I'm going to publish a roll of honor. Well up in the list will appear the names of Mrs. A. E. Hiner of Kansas and of Mr. George Hirdt of Quebec.

They have sent generously both the songs they themselves knew and such as they could obtain from friends. Mrs. Hiner's last contribution covered eleven closely written pages and Mr. Hirdt's thirty-two. Without even asking their consent, I'm going to appoint them our official collectors in their respective districts.

The Bishop of Old Canterbury

(From Mrs. A. E. Hiner, "as sung by an uncle years ago.")

A health to King John, that worthy old knight,
Who set up great wrongs and put down great rights!
And when he was seated, to make himself merry
He sent for the Bishop of Old Canterbury.
Sing fol de rol ol, sing fol de rol aye,
Sing fol de rol ol de rol ol de rol aye.

"Good morning, Mr. Bishop, 'twas told unto me
You set a far better table than I.
Now if you don't answer to my questions three
The head shall be taken from your body.

"My first question is, when I am in state,
With my golden crown all on my pate,
With all my ability, joy, and great mirth,
You must tell me to one penny just what I am worth.

"My next question is, without any doubt,
How long I'll be traveling this world about.
My last question is—and when I do wink
You must tell to me presently what I do think."

Now on his way home the old Bishop did meet
The old shepherd who kept his flocks on the plain.
"Good mornin', Mr. Bishop," the old shepherd did say,
"What news do you bring from the King's court today?"

"Oh, very bad news, Mr. Shepherd," said he.
"The old King has given me questions three.
And if I don't answer his questions quite right
The head will be taken from my body quite.

"His first question is, when he is in state,
With his golden crown all on his pate,
With all his ability, joy, and great mirth
I must tell to one penny just what he is worth.

"His next question is, without any doubt,
How long he'll be traveling this world about.
His last question is, and when he does wink,
I must tell to him presently what he does think."

"Go get me a suit of your gayest apparel,
And I'll go to King John and settle your quarrel."
"A suit of apparel you freely shall have,
And ten pounds a year as long as you live!"

Oh, now the old shepherd, oh, now he has gone
To answer the questions of King John.
And if he don't answer those questions quite right
The head will be take from his body quite!

"Good morning, Mr. Bishop," the old King did say.
"Have you come here to live or to die?"
"If I can answer to your questions three,
I hope your majesty will pardon me.

"Your first question is, when you are in state
With your golden crown all on your pate,
With all your ability, joy, and great mirth,
I must tell to one penny just what you are worth.

"For thirty bright pieces our Saviour was sold,
For thirty bright pieces of jewelers' gold;
Then twenty-nine pieces must be your just due,
For I think he was one piece better than you!

"Your next question is, without any doubt,
How long you'll be traveling this world about.
Arise with the sun, keep up with the same,
In twenty-four hours you will it obtain!

"Your last question is, and when you do wink
I must tell to you presently what you do think.
And this I will do, 'twill make your heart merry,
You *think* I'm the Bishop of Old Canterbury.

"You're very much mistaken; I am not that man;
I am the old Shepherd who keeps sheep on the plain,
And all the gay clothing I now have on,
The old Bishop gave me to keep myself warm."

And then the old King, looking up with a smile,
Says, "He shall be Bishop another while.
Go tell the old Bishop, go tell him for me,
He keeps a fine fellow if he keeps thee!"

The Butcher Boys

(From Mr. George Hirdt—"a Newfoundland text.")

There was three jolly butcher boys,
And butchers they were three;
They said they'll take ten thousand pound
Upon the King's highway.

As they was driving all alone
Fast as they could drive,
"Oh, stand! Oh, stand!" cried Johnson,
"I heard a woman cry!"

"I won't stand," cried Nelson.
"Nor I won't stand," cried Brian.
"I'll boldly stand," cried Johnson,
"For I hear a woman cry."

He nimbly turned his horse about
To search the green fields around,
And there he spied a woman
With her hair pinned to the ground.

"Oh, woman, oh, woman," cried Johnson,
"What brought you here this way?"
" 'Twas by three cursed robbers;
They brought me here to-day.

"They ripped me, they stripped me,
My hands and feet they bound;
They leaved me here stark naked
With my hair pinned to the ground!"

Johnson being a valiant man,
He took her up behind;
He took the coat from off his back
To shield her from the wind.

As they was driving all alone
As fast as they could drive,
She placed her finger to her lips
And gave one mournful cry.

Out stepped ten brave robbers
With weapons in their hand;
They stepped up to Sir Johnson
And ordered him to stand.

"I will stand," said Johnson,
"As long as I can stand.
I was never yet a coward
Or afraid of any man!"

Out of ten, nine he knocked down,
This woman he did not mind.
She drawed a knife all from his belt
And stabbed him through behind.

"Now I must fall," cried Johnson,
And fell upon the ground.
"It's by this cursed woman;
She gave me my death wound!"

The woman she was taken up
And bound in iron strong
For murdering one of the bravest men
That ever the sun shone on.

ADDRESS all letters for this department to R. W. Gordon, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MAY 8TH ISSUE

Adventure is now published twice a month—on the 8th and 23rd

The next issue will bring you the following stories:

FINGERPRINTS **A Complete Novelette** ***Gordon Young***
Who was *Guerini?*

JUSTICE **A Complete Novelette** ***Arthur O. Friel***
The jungle of the Orinoco remembers.

SON **A Complete Novelette** ***H. Bedford Jones***
An urchin of the Asiatic waterfronts picks a father.

A MANIFEST DESTINY **A Five-Part Story** **Part III**
General Walker molds a republic in Nicaragua. ***Arthur D. Howden Smith***

THE APPRENTICE WAY ***Bill Adams***
The captain threw it into the ocean.

I'LL BE A HARDY CAPTAIN **A Poem** ***Noel H. Stearn***

TRIAL BY FIRE ***Ernest Haycox***
Doctor Brent thought the rebellion a joke.

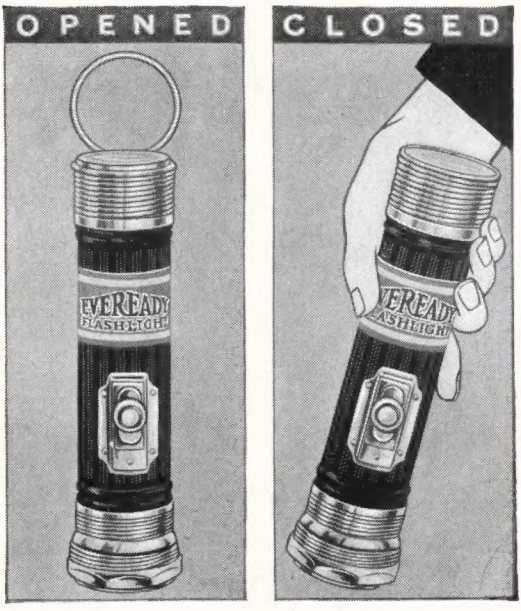
THE MARAUDERS ***F. St. Mars***
The minks got loose.

GIFTS OF ALLAH ***George E. Holt***
Ambition and a beggar.

DON LUIS ENTERTAINS ***John Dorman***
The *Yanquis* have no sense of humor.

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Talbot Mundy, Leonard H. Nason, Norman Springer, Leslie McFarlane, Harold Lamb, Captain Raabe, William P. Barron, Sidney Herschel Small and Charles Victor Fischer, and short stories by Arthur O. Friel, Royce Brier, F. St. Mars, David Thibault, John Dorman, Bruce Johns, F. R. Buckley, Albert Richard Wetjen, Post Sargent, Leo Walmsley, Fiswoode Tarleton and others.

A Thousand Things May Happen in the Dark



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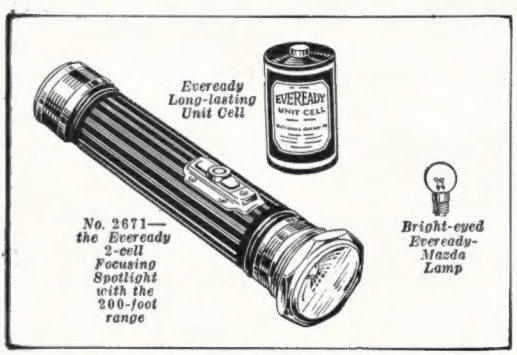
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